

Short Stories.

No. 728.

Week ending December 13th, 1902.

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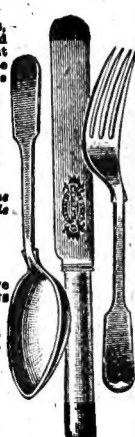
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Short Stories.

No. 728.

For the Week Ending December 15th, 1902.

ONE PENNY.

OUR NEW SERIAL STORY.

THE ALBERT GATE MYSTERY



♦ ♦ A Romance of To-day. ♦ ♦

By LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Final War," "The Lost Lady Delia," etc.

FIRST INSTALMENT.

A Mysterious Crime.

REGINALD BRETT, barrister-at-law and amateur detective, had seldom been more at peace with the world and his own conscience than when he entered the dining-room of his cosy flat this bright October morning.

Since the famous affair of Lady Delia Lyle's disappearance and death, he had not been busy, and the joy of healthy idleness is only known to the hard worker. Again, while dressing, he had received a letter inviting him to a quiet shoot at a delightful place in the country.

All these things blended with happy inconsequence to render Brett contented in mind and affable in manner.

"It's a fine morning, Smith," he said cheerily, as he settled himself at the table where his "man" was already pouring out the coffee.

"Bee-utiful, sir," said Smith.

"Smith!"

"Yessir."

"Not even the best English autumn weather can stand being called bee-utiful. Don't do it. You will open the flood-gates of Heaven."

Smith laughed decorously. He had not the slightest idea what his master meant, but if it pleased Mr. Brett to be jocose, it was the duty of a servant who knew his place, to be responsive.

The barrister fully understood Smith's delicate appreciation—and its limits. He instantly noticed that the morning paper, instead of reposing next to his folded napkin, was placed out of reach on a sideboard, and that the eggs and bacon made their appearance half-a-minute too soon.

As an expert swordsman delights to execute a pass *en tierce* with an umbrella, so did the cleverest analytical detective of the age, resolve to amaze his servitor.

"Smith," he said suddenly, composing his features to their most severe cross-examination aspect, "I think the arrangement is an excellent one."

"What arrangement, sir?"

"That Mrs. Smith and yourself should have a few days' holiday, while Mrs. Smith's brother takes your place during

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my forthcoming visit to Lord Northallerton's—why, man, what is the matter? Is it too hot?"—for the cover Smith had lifted off the bacon and eggs clattered violently on to the table.

"Ot, sir. 'Ot isn't the word. You're a fair lickier, that's wot you are."

Smith invariably dropped his h's when he became excited.

"Smith, I insist that you shall not call me names. Pass the paper."

"But, sir—"

"Pass the paper. Utter another word and I refuse to accept Mrs. Smith's brother as your *locum tenens*."

Smith was silenced by the last terrible epithet. Yet he was so manifestly nervous that Brett resolved to enlighten him before plunging into the day's news.

"For the last time, Smith," he said, "I will explain to you why it is hopeless for you to think of concealing tradesmen's commissions from me."

The shot went home, but the enemy was acquainted with this method of attack, and did not wince.

"You knew that Lord Northallerton had recently invited me to his October pheasant-shooting. During the last few days a youth who grotesquely reproduces Mrs. Smith's most prominent features, has mysteriously tenanted the kitchen, ill-cleaned my boots, and bungled over the studs in my shirts. This morning a letter came with a crest and the Northallerton postmark. Really, Smith, considering that you have now breathed the same air as myself for eight long years, I did not expect to be called upon for an explanation. Besides, you have destroyed a masterpiece."

"Sir—" began Smith.

"Oh, I understand, there is nothing broken but your reputation. Don't you see that the mere placing of the newspaper at a distance, so that you might have a chance to speak before I opened it, was a subtle stroke, worthy of Leocœ. Yet you demand feeble words. What a pity! Know, Smith, that true genius is dumb. Speech may be silver but silence is surely gold."

The barrister solemnly unfolded the paper, and Smith faded from the room. On a page usually devoted to important



announcements, the following paragraphs stood forth in the boldness of leaded type.—

MYSTERIOUS OCCURRENCE IN THE WEST END.

An affair of some magnitude—perhaps a remarkable crime—has taken place in an Albert Gate Mansion.

Owing to the reticence of the authorities, it is at present impossible to arrive at a definite conclusion as to the nature or extent of the incident, but it is quite certain that public interest will be much excited when details are forthcoming. All sorts of rumours attain credence in the locality,

the murder of several prominent persons being not the least persistent of these. Without, however, giving currency to idle speculation, several authentic statements may be grouped into a connected form.

Four weeks ago a party of Turkish gentlemen of high rank in Constantinople, arrived in London and took up their abode in the house in question, after some structural alterations pointing at great security within and without, had been planned and executed.

Attending these Turkish gentlemen, or officials, was a numerous suite of Moslem guards and servants, whilst, immediately following their arrival, came from Amsterdam, some dozen noted experts in the diamond-cutting industry. These were lodged in a neighbouring private hotel, where they were extremely uncommunicative as to their business in London. They were employed during the day at the Albert Gate house. The presence in the mansion, both day and night, of a strong force of Metropolitan police, tended to excite local curiosity to an intense degree, but no clear conception of the business of the occupants was allowed to reach the public.

Whatever it was that took place, the full particulars were not only well-known to the authorities—the presence of the police hints even at Governmental sanction—but matters proceeded on normal lines until yesterday morning.

Then it became clear that a remarkable development must have occurred during the preceding night, as the whole of the Dutch workmen and the Turkish attendants were taken off in cabs by the police, not to Morton Street Police Station, but to Scotland Yard, this in itself being a most unusual course to adopt. They are unquestionably detained in custody, but they have not yet been charged before a magistrate.

The police, later in the day, carried off some of these men's personal belongings, from both hotel and mansion.

A sinister aspect was given to the foregoing mysterious proceedings by the presence at Albert Gate, early in the day, of two police surgeons, who were followed, about twelve o'clock, by Dr. Tennyson Coke, the greatest living authority on toxicology.

Dr. Coke and the other medical gentlemen subsequently refused to impart the slightest information as to the reasons that led the police to seek their services, and the Scotland Yard authorities are adamant in the matter.

The representative of a news agency was threatened with arrest for trespass when he endeavoured to gain admission to the Albert Gate house, and it is quite evident that the police are determined to prevent the facts from leaking out at present—if they can by any means accomplish their wishes.

Brett read this interesting statement twice slowly. It fascinated him. Its very vagueness, its admissions of inability to tell what had really happened, its adroit use of such phrases

as "Turkish gentlemen of high rank," "noted experts in the diamond-cutting industry," "the greatest living authority on toxicology," betrayed the hand of the disappointed journalistic artist.

"Excellent," he murmured aloud. "It is the breath of battle to my nostrils. I ought to tip Smith for my breakfast. Had I read this earlier, I would not have eaten a morsel."

He carefully examined the page at the back. It contained matter of no consequence—a London County Council debate—so he took a pair of scissors from his pocket and cut out the complete item, placing the slip as a votive offering in front of a finely executed bust of Edgar Allen Poe, that stood on a bookcase behind him.

Within three minutes the scissors were again employed. The new cutting ran—

There is trouble at Yildiz Kiosk. A Reuter's telegram from Constantinople states that a near relative of the Sultan has fled to France. The Porte have asked the French Government to apprehend him, but the French Ambassador has informed Riaz Pasha that this course is impracticable in the absence of any criminal charge.

"These two are one," said the barrister, as he turned towards Poe's bust, and laid the slip by the side of its predecessor. This time he had mutilated a critique of an Ibsenite drama.

The rest of the newspaper's contents had no special interest for him, and he soon threw down the journal in order to rise, light a cigarette, and muster sufficient energy to write a telegram accepting Lord Northallerton's invitation for the following day.

He was on the point of reaching for a telegraph form when Smith entered with a card. It bore the name and address—

"The Earl of Fairholme, Stanhope Gate."

"Curious," thought Brett. Where is his lordship? "he said aloud. "At the door, or in the street?"

His flat was on the second floor.

"In a keb, sir."

"Bring his lordship up."

Talbot's Disappearance.

A RAPID glance at "Debrett" revealed that the Earl of Fairholme was thirty, unmarried, the fourteenth of his line, and the possessor of country seats at Fairholme, Warwickshire and Glen Spey, Inverness.

The Earl entered, an athletic, well-groomed man, one whose lines were usually cast in pleasant places, but who now was in an unwonted state of flurry and annoyance.

Each man was favourably impressed with the other in the first moment. His lordship produced an introductory card, and Brett was astonished to find that it bore the name of the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

"I have come—" commenced his lordship hesitatingly.

But the barrister broke in. "You have had a bad night, Lord Fairholme. You wish for a long and comfortable chat. Now, won't you start with a whisky and soda, light a cigar, and draw an easy chair up to the fire?"

"Pon my honour, Mr. Brett, you begin well. You give me confidence. Those are the first cheerful words I have heard for twenty-four hours."

The Earl was easily manoeuvred into a strong light. Then he made a fresh start.

"You have doubtless heard of this Albert Gate affair, Mr. Brett?"

"You mean this?" said the other, rising and handing to his visitor the longer paragraph of the two he had selected from the newspaper.

"That is very curious," said the earl, momentarily startled.

But he was too pre-occupied by his thoughts to pay much heed to the incident. He merely glanced at the cutting and went on:

"Yes, that is it. Well, Edith—Miss Talbot, I mean—vows that she won't marry me until this beastly business

is cleared up. Of course, we all know that Jack didn't slope with the diamonds. He's tied up or dead, for sure. But—no matter what may have become of him—why the dickens that should stop Edith from marrying me is more than I can fathom. Just look at some of the women in Society. They don't leave it to their relatives to be mixed up in a scandal, I can tell you. Still, there you are. Edith is jolly clever and awfully determined, so you've got to find him, Mr. Brett. Dead or alive, he must be found, and cleared."

"He shall," said Brett, gazing into the fire.

The quiet, self-reliant voice steadied the young peer. He checked an imminent flow of words, picked up the newspaper slip again and this time read it.

Then he blushed.

"You must think me very stupid, Mr. Brett, to burst out in such a manner when you probably have never heard of the people I am talking about."

"You will tell me, Lord Fairholme, if you get quietly to work and try to speak, so far as you find it possible, in chronological sequence."

His lordship knitted his brows and smoked in silence. At last he found utterance.

"That's a good idea of yours. It makes things easier. Well, first of all, Edith and I became engaged. Edith is the daughter of the late Admiral Talbot. She and Jack, her brother, live with their uncle, General Sir Hubert Fitz-james, at 118, Ulster Gardens. Jack is in the Foreign Office; he is just like Edith, awfully clever and that sort of thing, an assistant secretary, I think they call him. Now we're getting on, aren't we?"

"Splendidly."

"That's all right. About a month ago a chap, turns up from Constantinople, a kind of special envoy from the Sultan, and he explains to the Foreign Office that he has in his possession a lot of uncut diamonds of terrific value, including one as big as a duck's egg, to which no figures would give a price. Do you follow me?"

"Each word."

"Good. Well—I can't tell you why, because I don't know, and I could not understand it if I did—there was some political importance attached to these gems, and the Sultan roped our Foreign Office into it. So the Foreign Office placed Jack in charge of the business. He fixed up the envoy in the house at Albert Gate, got a lot of diamond cutters and machinery for him, gave him into the charge of all the smart policemen in London, and what do you think is the upshot?"

"What?"

"The envoy, his two secretaries, and a confidential servant were murdered the night before last, the diamonds were stolen, and Jack has vanished—absolutely gone clean into space, not a sign of him to be found anywhere. Yesterday Edith sends for me, cries for half-an-hour, tells me I'm the

best fellow that ever lived, and then I'm jiggered if she didn't wind up by saying that she couldn't marry me."

The Earl of Fairholme was now worked up to fever-heat. He would not calm down for an appreciable period, so Brett resolved to try the effect of curiosity.

He wrote a telegram to Lord Northallerton—

"Very sorry, but I cannot leave town at present. Please ask me later. Will explain reason for postponement when we meet."

He had touched the dominant note in mankind.

"Surely!" cried the earl, "you have not already decided upon a course of action?"

"Not exactly. I am wiring to postpone a shooting fixture."

"What a beastly shame!" exclaimed the other, in whom the sporting instinct was at once aroused. "I'm awfully sorry my affairs should interfere with your arrangements in this way."

"Not a bit," cried Brett. "I make it a sacred rule of life to put pleasure before business. I mean," he explained, as a look of bewilderment crossed his hearer's face, "that this quest of ours promises to be the most remarkable affair I have ever been engaged in. That pleases me. Pheasant-shooting is a serious business, governed by the calendar and arranged by the headkeeper."

An electric bell summoned Smith. The barrister handed him the telegram and a sovereign.

"Read that message," he said. "Ponder over it. Send it, and give the change of the sovereign to Mrs. Smith's brother, with my compliments and regrets."

Then he turned to Lord Fairholme.

"Just one question," he said, "before I send you off to bed. No, you must not protest. I want you to meet me here this evening at seven, with

your brain clear and your nerves restored by a good, sound sleep. We will dine, here or elsewhere, and act subsequently. But at this moment I want to know the name of the person most readily accessible who can tell me all about Mr. Talbot's connection with the Sultan's agent."

"His sister, undoubtedly."

"Where can I find her?"

"At Ulster Gardens. I will drive you there."

The barrister smiled. "You are going to bed, I tell you. Give me a few lines of introduction to Miss Talbot."

The earl's face had brightened at the prospect of meeting his fiancée under the favourable conditions of Brett's presence. But he yielded with good grace, and promptly sat down to write a brief note explanatory of the barrister's identity and position in the inquiry.

The two parted at the door, and a hansom rapidly brought Brett to the residence of Sir Hubert Fitz-james.

A stately footman took Reggie's card and its accompanying letter, placed them on a salver with a graceful turn of his





wrist, which oddly suggested a similar turn in his nose, and said: "Miss Talbot is not at home, sir."

"Yes, she is," answered Brett, paying the driver of the hansom.

The footman deigned to exhibit astonishment. Here was a gentleman—one obviously accustomed to the manners of Society—who declined to accept the courteous disclaimer of an unexpected visit.

"Miss Talbot is not receiving visitors," he explained.

"Exactly. Take that card and the letter to Miss Talbot and bring me the answer."

James was no match for his antagonist. He silently showed the way into a reception room

and disappeared. A minute later he announced, with much deference, that Miss Talbot would see Mr. Brett in the library, and he conducted this mysterious visitor upstairs.

On rejoining Buttons in the hall he solemnly observed: "That's a swell cop who is with the missus—shining topper, button-hole, buckskin gloves, patent leathers, all complete. Footmen ain't in it with the force, nowadays."

James expanded his magnificent waistcoat with a heavy sigh over this philosophical dictum, the poignancy of which was enhanced by his knowledge that the upper housemaid had taken to conversing with a mounted policeman in the Park during her afternoon off.

The apartment in which Brett found himself gave ready indications of the character of its tenants. Tod's "Rajasthan" jostled a volume of the Badminton Library on the bookshelves, a copy of the Allahabad *Pioneer* lay alongside the *Field* and the *Times* on the table, and many varieties of horns made trophies with quaint weapons on the walls.

A complete edition of Ruskin, and some exquisite prints of Rossetti's best known works, supplied a different set of emblems, whilst the room generally showed signs of daily occupation.

"Anglo-Indian uncle, artistic niece," was the barrister's rapid comment, but further analysis was prevented by the entrance of Miss Edith Talbot.

The surprise of the pair was mutual.

Brett expected to see a young, pretty and clever girl, vain enough to believe she had brains, and sufficiently well endowed with that rare commodity to be able to twist the good-natured Earl of Fairholme round her little finger.

Young, not more than twenty—unquestionably beautiful, with the graceful contour and delicately-balanced features of a portrait by Romney—Edith Talbot bore few of the marks that pass current as the outward and visible signs of a modern woman of Society. That she should be self-possessed and dressed in perfect taste were as obvious adjuncts of her character as that each phase of her clear thought should reflect itself in a singularly mobile face.

To such a woman pretence was impossible, the polite fictions of fashionable life impossible. Brett readily understood why the Earl of Fairholme had fallen in love with this fair creature. The honourable, typical, British peer had simply bent in worship before a goddess of his own creed.

To the girl Brett was equally a revelation.

Fairholme's introductory note described the barrister as "the smartest criminal lawyer in London—one whose aid would be invaluable." She expected to meet a sharp-featured, wizened, elderly man, with gold-rimmed eye-glasses, a queer voice, and a nasty habit of asking unexpected questions.

In place of this commonplace personality, she encountered a handsome, well-groomed gentleman—one who won confidence by his intellectual face, and retained it by invisibly establishing a social equality. Fortunately, there is yet in Britain an aristocracy wherein good birth is synonymous

with good breeding—a freemasonry whose pass-words cannot be simulated, nor its membership bought.

Brett read the wonder in the girl's eyes, and hastened to explain.

Mehemet Ali's Note.

"THE Earl of Fairholme," said Brett, "thought I might be of some service in the matter of your brother's strange disappearance, Miss Talbot. I am not a professional detective, but my friends are good enough to believe that I am very successful in unravelling mysteries that are beyond the ken of Scotland Yard. I have heard something of the facts in this present affair. Will you trust me so far as to tell me all that is known to you personally?"

"My uncle, General Fitzjames has just gone to Scotland Yard," she began, timidly.

"Quite so. Perhaps you would prefer to await his return?"

"Oh, no, I do not mean that. But it is so hard to know how best to act. Uncle expects the police to accomplish impossibilities. He says that they should long since have found out what has become of Jack. Perhaps they might resent my interference."

"My interference, to be exact," said Reggie, with the pleasant smile that had fascinated so many women. Even Edith Talbot was not wholly proof against its magic.

"I, personally, have little faith in them," she confessed.

"I have none."

"Well, I will do as you advise."

"Then I recommend you to take me into your confidence. I know Scotland Yard and its methods. We do not follow the same path."

"I believe in you and trust you," said the girl.

So ingenuous was the look from the large, deep eyes which accompanied this declaration of confidence, that many men would have pronounced Miss Talbot to be an experienced flirt.

Brett knew better. He simply bowed his acknowledgments.

"What is it that you want to know?" she continued.

"We ourselves are no better informed than the newspapers as to what has actually happened, save that four men have been killed as the result of a carefully-planned robbery. As for my brother—"

She paused and strove hard to force back her tears.

"Your brother has simply vanished, Miss Talbot. If the criminals did not scruple to leave four dead men behind, they would not draw the line at a fifth. The clear inference is that your brother is alive but under restraint."

"I can see that it is possible he was alive until some time after the tragedy at Albert Gate. But—but—what connection can Jack have with the theft of diamonds worth millions? These people used him as their tool in some manner. Why should they spare him when success had crowned their efforts?"

"We are conversing in riddles. Will you explain?"

"You know that my brother is an assistant Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office?"

"Yes."

"Well, early in September, his chief placed him in charge of a special undertaking. The Sultan had decided to have a large number of rough diamonds cut and polished by the best European experts. They were all magnificent gems, exceedingly valuable it seems, being rare both in size and purity; but one of them was larger than any known diamond. Jack told me it was quite as big as a good-sized hen's egg. Both it and the others, he said, had the appearance of lumps of alum, but experts said that the smaller stones were worth more than a million sterling, whilst the price of the large one could not be fixed. No one but an Emperor or Sultan would buy it. His Excellency, Mehemet Ali Pasha, was the especial envoy charged with this mission, and he brought credentials to the Foreign Office asking for facilities to be given for its execution. He and the two secretaries who accompanied him have been killed."

"Yes?" said Brett, whose eyes were fixed intently upon the hearthrug.

"Jack was given the special duty of looking after Mehemet Ali and his companions during their residence in London. It was his business to afford them every assistance in his power, to procure them police protection, obtain for them the best advice attainable in the diamond trade, and generally place at their disposal all the resources which the British Government itself could command if it undertook such a curious task. He had been with them about a month—not hourly engaged, you understand, as once the preliminary arrangements were made, he had little further trouble—but he used to call there every morning and afternoon to see if he could render any assistance. Matters had progressed so favourably until the day before yesterday, that in another month he hoped to see the last of them. He was always saying that he would be glad when the business was ended, as he did not like to be officially connected with the fate of a few little bits of stone that happened to be so immensely valuable."

"Did your brother call there as usual on Monday afternoon?" said Brett.

"Yes; he came straight here from Albert Gate, and had tea with uncle and myself. He sat in the very chair and in the very position you now occupy. I can remember him saying: 'By Jove! the Hen's Egg'—that is what he used to call the big diamond—is turning out in fine style.' He even discussed the possibility of bringing us to see the collection when it was finished and before it left this country."

"Did your brother say why the diamonds were brought to this country in the first instance?"

"Yes; the Sultan and his advisers seemed to think the work of cutting them could be performed more safely and expeditiously here than anywhere else. Even the Turk has a high regard for the manner in which law and order are maintained in Britain. Yet the sequel has shown that the diamonds and their guardians were perhaps in greater danger here than they would have been in Constantinople."

"Was that the only reason?" said Brett, who had apparently made up his mind with reference to the pattern of the carpet, and was now gazing into the bright fire which danced merrily in the grate, for the day though fine was chilly.

The girl wrinkled her brows in thought before she answered:

"I think I do remember Jack saying that he believed there was some State business mixed up in the affair, but I am quite sure he did not know the exact facts himself."

"Can you recollect any of the special precautions taken to protect the gems? Your brother may have mentioned some details in conversation, you know."

"Oh, I think I know all about them. In the first instance, the house at Albert Gate had previously been tenanted by a rich banker, and it was well defended by all ordinary means against the attacks of ordinary burglars. But, in addition to this, before the diamonds left their safe at the Bank of England, the building was practically torn to pieces inside by workmen acting

under the direction of the Commissioner of Police. It was absolutely impossible for anyone to enter except through the front door, unless they flew out of the second storey window. Servants and workmen, like everybody else, had to use this door alone, as the windows and doors in the basement had all been bricked up. Inside the entrance-hall there were always twelve policemen, and an inspector in charge.

"Everyone who left the house was searched by the inspector on duty, and Jack used to say that he was very glad he invariably insisted upon this examination, although the police were at first disinclined to meet his wishes in the matter, he being, so to speak, their direct superior for the time. Beneath the entrance-hall were several Turkish and other servants. Mehemet Ali himself, in the presence of his secretaries, used to open the door leading to the suite of apartments in which the diamond cutters worked, and two of the Turkish gentlemen would remain there all day until the men left in the evening. The envoy and both secretaries used to meet Jack when he visited the place, and for the last three weeks he had nothing to do but see the diamonds, count them, drink an excellent cup of coffee, and smoke a wonderful cigarette, made of some special Turkish tobacco, cultivated and prepared only for the Imperial household."

"Ah!" sighed Brett, with a note of almost unconscious envy in his voice. He knew exactly what that coffee and those cigarettes would be like. "I beg your pardon," he went on, perceiving that Miss Talbot did not understand his exclamation. "Will you tell me as nearly as you can the occurrences of Monday evening?"

"They were simple enough," said the girl. "My brother dined at home. We had one or two guests, and were all in the drawing-room about 10.15, when a note came for him from Mehemet Ali. I know exactly what was in it, as I looked over his shoulder whilst he read it. The words were: 'I wish to see you to-night on important business. Come, if possible, at once.' I have to tell you that it was in French, but this is an exact translation."

"Your brother was quite sure that it was from Mehemet Ali himself?" said Brett.

"Quite sure," was the reply. "He knew his handwriting well, having had several communications from him during the progress of the business."

"Did your brother leave the house immediately?" asked Brett.

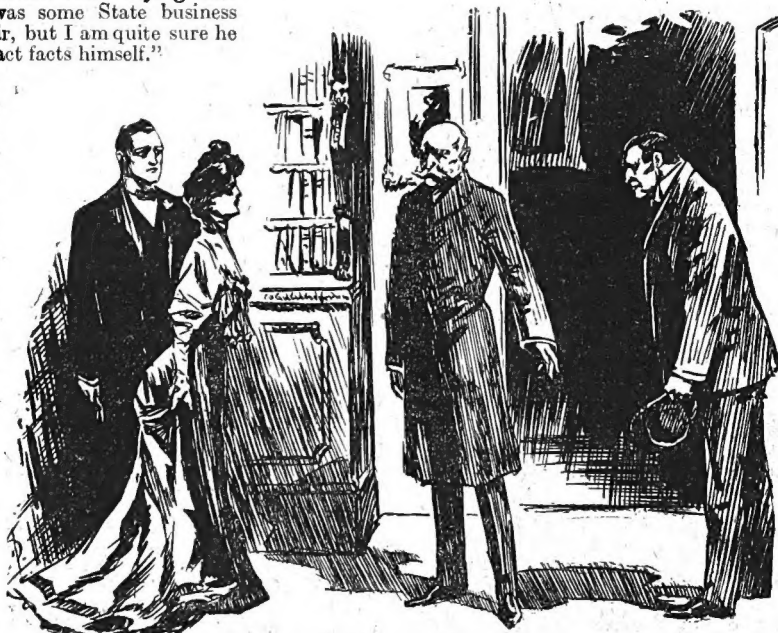
"That instant. He went downstairs, put on his overcoat and hat, and got into a cab with the messenger who brought the note."

"Do you know who this messenger was?"

"One of the policemen on duty in the house itself."

A slight pause ensued, and Brett was about to take his departure, having no further questions to ask at the moment, when someone was heard hastily ascending the stairs, talking to a companion as he advanced.

"This is my uncle," exclaimed



"This, my dear, is Mr. Winter, of Scotland Yard."

Miss Talbot, rising to go to the door. Before she could reach it an elderly gentleman entered, bearing upon him all those distinguished tokens that stamp a man as a retired major-general.

He exclaimed impetuously:
"I have brought a gentleman from Scotland Yard, my dear." Then he caught sight of Brett, and said: "Who is this?"

Edith was about to explain when another man entered, a strongly-built, bullet-headed man, with keen eyes and firm mouth, and a curious suggestion in his appearance of having combined pugilism with process-serving as a professional means of existence. His face extended into a smile when his eyes fell upon the barrister.

"Ah! Mr. Brett," he cried. "Now we have something to do that is up to your mark. You are on the spot first, as usual, but this time I can honestly say that I am glad to see you."

Sir Hubert Fitzjames glanced in astonishment from his niece to the barrister, but could find nothing better to say than:

"This, my dear, is Mr. Winter, of Scotland Yard."

Where the Crime was Done.

BRETT promptly cleared up the situation by explaining to Sir Hubert, in a few brief words, the reason for his unexpected presence, and when the Major-General learnt the name of the distinguished personage who had sent Lord Fairholme to the barrister he expressed a ready acquiescence in the desire to utilise his services. Nor was the effect of such a notable introduction lost on Mr. Winter, whose earlier knowledge of the barrister's remarkable achievements in unravelling the tangled skein of criminal investigation was now supplemented by a certain amount of awe for a man who commanded the confidence of His Majesty's Government.

"Well," said Sir Hubert Fitzjames, with the brisk animation of one accustomed to utter commands that must be instantly obeyed, "we will now proceed to business."

For the moment no one spoke. The Scotland Yard detective evidently wished his distinguished colleague to take the lead, and no sooner did Brett perceive this fact than he rose, bowed politely to Miss Talbot and her uncle, and said:

"The first thing to do is to trace the whereabouts of Mr. Talbot, and this should be a comparatively easy task. The other features of this strange occurrence impress me as highly complex, but it is far too early a stage in the investigation to permit any definite opinion being expressed at this moment."

Every one seemed to be surprised at Brett's evident resolve to take his departure.

"Where are you going to, sir?" said Mr. Winter.

"That depends largely upon you," was the smiling reply. "If you come with me we will go direct to Albert Gate, but

if you decide upon prosecuting further inquiries here, I will await your arrival at my flat."

"That is as much as saying that there are no facts worth inquiring into to be learnt here?"

"Exactly so," replied the barrister. "Miss Talbot has told me all that is material to our purpose. Her brother was unexpectedly sent for after dinner on Monday night and left the house hurriedly, without affording any clue as to his subsequent movements beyond that contained in a brief note sent to him by Mehemet Ali Pasha. Indeed, it was impossible for him to afford any explanation, as he himself was quite unprepared for the summons. Meanwhile, every moment that we lose

in the endeavour to follow up his actions is precious time wasted."

The barrister's manner, no less than his words, impressed Mr. Winter so forcibly that he also rose from the seat which he had occupied with the intention of conducting a long and careful examination of each member of the household.

"Then I will come with you at once," he said.

"Oh," cried the Major-General, "I understood you to say as we came here that there were many questions which required immediate inquiry in this house, on the principle that the movements of the missing man should be minutely traced from the very commencement."

Mr. Winter looked somewhat confused, but Edith Talbot broke in:

"I think, uncle dear, it would be well to defer to Mr. Brett's judgment."

"Do you really believe," she said, turning to the barrister, "that you will soon be able to find my brother?"

"I am quite sure of it," he replied, and the conviction in his tone astonished the professional detective, whilst it carried a message of hope to the others. Even Sir Hubert, for some reason which he could not explain, suddenly experienced a strong sense of confidence in this reserved, distinguished-looking man. He stepped forward eagerly and held out his hand, saying:

"Then we will not detain you, Mr. Brett. Act as you think fit in all things, but do let us have all possible information at the earliest moment. The suspense and uncertainty of the present position of affairs are terribly trying to my niece and myself." The old soldier spoke with dignity and composure, but an involuntary quiver of his lips, as he uttered the concluding words, betrayed his anguish.

Brett and Mr. Winter then quitted the house; they hailed a hansom, and were soon driving rapidly towards Albert Gate.

"Do you know," said the man from Scotland Yard, breaking a silence of some moments' duration, "you surprised me by what you said just now, Mr. Brett."

"I thought you were too old a hand to be surprised at anything," was the reply.

"But, come now, you know well enough what I mean. You said you thought it would be a comparatively simple matter to find Mr. Talbot, whilst the other features of the crime are very complex. Now the affair, thus far, impresses me as being the exact opposite to that statement. The crime is simple enough. A clever gang of thieves get into the place by working some particularly cool and daring confidence game. They don't hesitate at murder to cover up their tracks, and they make away with the plunder under the very noses of the police. All this may be smart and up-to-date in its methods, but it is not unusual. The difficult question to my mind is, what have they done with Mr. Talbot, and how did they succeed in fooling him so completely as to make him what one might almost call a party to the transaction?"

The barrister pulled out a cigar-case.

"Try one of these, Winter," he said. "You will find them soothing."

"I never smoke whilst on business," was the testy reply.

"I invariably do," and he proceeded to light a cigar, and smoke with keen zest.

"I do not know how it is," went on Mr. Winter, "but whenever I happen to meet you, Mr. Brett, in the course of an inquiry, I always start by being very angry with you."

"Why?" There was an amused twinkle in Brett's eyes, which might have warned the other of a possible pitfall.

"Because you treat me as if I were a precocious youth. You listen to my theories with a sort of pitying indulgence, yet I have the reputation of being one of the best men in Scotland Yard, or I should not have been put on to this job. And I am older than you too."

"I may surely pity you," said Brett, "even if I don't indulge you too much."

"There you are again," snapped the detective. "Now, what is there silly about my theory of the crime, I should like to know?"



"You shall know, and before you are much older. Bear with me for a little while, I beg of you. You may be right, and I may be quite wrong, but I think there is much beneath the surface in the investigations we are now pursuing. My advice to you is to drop all preconceived theories, but to note every circumstance, however remote it may appear in its bearing upon events, and in any case not to act precipitately. Whatever you do, don't arrest anybody."

"But," said the other, somewhat mollified by Brett's earnestness, "half-a-dozen people may be arrested at any moment."

"Pray tell me how?"

"Well, you know, descriptions of the stolen diamonds and of the suspected persons are in every police office in Great Britain and in most Continental centres by this time. Passengers by all steamers are most carefully scrutinised. Every pawnbroker or diamond merchant in the country is on the look-out, and, generally speaking, it will be odd if somebody does not drop into the net before many hours have passed."

"It will, indeed," murmured Brett; "and no doubt the somebody in question will experience a certain amount of inconvenience before he proves to you that he had nothing whatever to do with the matter. Now, don't answer me, Winter, but ponder seriously over this question: Do you really think that the intelligence which planned and successfully carried through an operation of such magnitude will be trapped by plain-clothes constables watching the gangways of steamships, or by any pawnbroker who has ever lent half the value of a pledge?"

Almost impatiently the barrister waved the subject out of the hansom, and the detective had sense enough to leave him alone during the few remaining minutes before the vehicle pulled up near the Albert Gate mansion.

Brett stopped the driver some little distance short of the house itself, as he did not wish to attract the attention of a knot of curious sightseers in the street. He asked Winter to go on in front and make known the fact that he was coming, so that there would be no delay at the door. This the detective readily agreed to, and Brett rapidly took in the main external features of the house which had become the scene of such a remarkable tragedy.

It was a palatial structure, built on the sombre lines of the Early Victorian period. Miss Talbot's brief description of the measures taken to protect its occupants from interference was fully borne out by its aspect. There was no access to the basement; the main entrance was situated at the side; all the ground-floor and first-storey windows facing on the street were fitted with immovable wooden venetians. Presumably those on the Park side were similarly secured, whilst the back wall abutted on to that of another mansion, equally large and strongly built, tenanted by a well-known peer.

Truly, it required a genius almost unrivalled in the annals of crime, to murder four people and steal diamonds worth millions in such a place whilst guarded by twelve London policemen and under the special protection of the Home Office.

What the Police Saw.

THE appearance of Winter at the door caused the gaping idlers in the street to endeavour to draw nearer to the mysterious portals. Thereupon three policemen on duty outside hustled the mob back, and Brett took advantage of the confusion thus created to slip to the doorway almost unperceived. One of the police-constables turned round to make a grab at him, but a signal from a *confrère* inside prevented this, and Brett quickly found himself within a spacious entrance-hall with the door closed and bolted behind him.

Winter was talking to two uniformed inspectors, to whom he had explained the barrister's mission and credentials.

"We have here, Mr. Brett," he said, "Inspector Walters, who was on duty until ten o'clock on Monday night, and Inspector Sharpe, who relieved him. They will both tell you exactly what took place."

"Thank you," said the barrister; "but it will expedite matters if you gentlemen will first accompany me over the scene of the crime. I will then be able to understand more accurately what happened. Suppose we start here. I presume that this is where the police guard was stationed?"

Inspector Walters assumed the role of guide.

"I was in charge of the first guard established here a month ago," he said, "and the arrangements I then made have been adhered to without deviation night and day ever since."

He then led the way. But the internal construction of the house will be better comprehended if the inspector's verbal description be dispensed with.

From the outer door a short passage of a few feet led up half-a-dozen steps into the spacious central hall, the entrance to which was closed by a light double-door, half glass. On both sides of the first short passage were two small rooms, such as are often used in London mansions for the purposes of cloak-rooms during a reception or ball. The doors from these rooms opened into the inner hall. A large dining-room was situated on the left or Park side, and on the right was a breakfast or morning-room. At the back of the entrance-hall a handsome staircase led from left to right to the upper floors, whilst a doorway in the extreme right of the hall, and beneath the staircase, showed the way down to the kitchens and basement offices.

"Here," said the inspector, pointing to the foot of the staircase, "two police-constables were constantly stationed. Another stood there," indicating the passage to the kitchen, "and a fourth at the glass door. As the outer basement entrance was not only securely fastened by bolts and bars, but actually bricked up inside, it was absolutely impossible for any person to enter or leave the house save by the front door, nor could any one go from the kitchen to the upper part of the house without passing under the observation of all four constables. I arranged my guards in military fashion, having three men for each post, with one hour on duty and two hours off, but the same men were never on guard together at definite hours, as they were relieved at varying times. You will understand that I considered it a very responsible task to safeguard these premises, and thought it best to render it impossible for any section of the force at my command to take part in a conspiracy, even though such a thing was in itself most improbable."

They then ascended the staircase and found themselves on the first floor, where were situated the chief reception-rooms.

There were six spacious apartments on this storey, and all of them had originally opened out on to the landing. The special precautions taken to guard the diamonds of the Turkish mission, however, had altered all that. Five doorways had been bricked up, the result being that admission to the whole set of rooms could only be obtained through the first door that faced the top of the staircase.

This apartment was luxuriously furnished, and Inspector Walters explained that the Turkish Envoy and his suite passed the working hours of each day there, after they had personally thrown open the other apartments to the diamond polishers, and unlocked the safes in which the gems had been stored when work ceased on the previous day.

"His Excellency," said the inspector, "kept the keys of this room and the others, together with those of the safes, in his own possession night and day. He slept upstairs, and so did the other two gentlemen. No one was allowed even to come to this floor except the confidential servant, named Hussein, who used to bring coffee, cigars, and newspapers or other things the gentlemen might require, together



with their lunch in the middle of the day. The workmen used to bring their lunch with them, so that they came in and out once a day only."

"Where did this confidential servant sleep?" said Brett.

"I believe he used to lie curled up on the rug outside his Excellency's door."

"And the other servants?"

"They all slept in the basement."

"What were they, Turks or Christians?"

"Well, sir," said the inspector with a smile, "two of them were Turks in costume, whilst three were Christians in appearance. That is the best I can say for them, as they were Frenchmen, though certainly the cook was a first-rate chef. Of course, we all got our meals here whilst on duty."

"Did his Excellency and the other members of the mission eat food prepared in the ordinary way?"

"Oh, yes; they appreciated French dishes as keenly as anybody might do."

"It was in this room, then," continued Brett, "that the murders took place?"

"Yes; I suppose that must be so," said the inspector. "But my friend here," pointing to Inspector Sharpe, "can tell that part of the story better than I can."

They passed into the inner rooms, which were quite silent and deserted, and presented a strange appearance considering the character of the house and its locality. Although the ceilings were decorated with beautiful paintings and fringed with superbly emblazoned mouldings; although the walls were papered with material that cost as much per yard as good silk, each apartment was occupied with workmen's benches and curious devices for cutting and polishing diamonds.

In the first room were two small safes, one of which was intended to receive the gems under treatment at the close of each day's work; the other held certain valuable materials required in the diamond-cutters' operations. Three of the rooms were on the Park side, and it was here that the small colony of skilled artisans had been installed.

The other two rooms were not used, nor had any communicating doors been broken through the walls in order to gain access to them.

The windows of the three apartments occupied by the workmen were not only guarded by strong iron bars, but possessed the additional security of external wire blinds of comparatively small mesh. Each window admitted plenty of light, and could be raised to allow a free circulation of air, but it was seemingly quite impossible for any active communication to take place with the outside. The three rooms looked on to a small inclosed lawn, which was separated from the Park by a brick wall surmounted by iron railings. All the fireplaces had been closed with bricks and mortar.

"You will see, sir," said the inspector, when he had called Brett's attention to these details, "that, mysterious though the murders were, they were as nothing compared with the disappearance of the diamonds. Every person who came downstairs was most carefully and methodically searched each time he passed the constable on duty at the bottom. It may be admitted that a few small stones could be so secreted as to escape observation, but some of these stones were so large that such a notion is not to be thought of, whilst the size of the great diamond which Mr. Talbot christened the 'Hen's Egg' rendered its transference past the searchers beneath absolutely impossible. There was no humbug about the search, you will understand, Mr. Brett. People had to take their boots off, open their mouths, and hand over their hats, coats, sticks, or umbrellas for inspection. Every part of their clothing was scrutinised, and the contents of their pockets, money, watches, keys, and the rest, thoroughly examined. These were our orders, and they were strictly obeyed, Mr. Talbot himself being the first to insist that the regulation should be carried out rigidly, so far as he was concerned. Why, one day a Cabinet Minister came here to see the diamonds. He was elderly and stout, and did not at all like having to take off his boots, I can assure you. And in spite of all this the diamonds have gone!"

(A further long instalment will be published next Tuesday.)



Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

December 9.—Those whose birthdays fall to-day will do well to attend closely to business during the next twelve months, or trouble may come.

Girls born near seven p.m. will have friction and discord in love affairs.

The day is evil for travel and speculating; favourable for dealing with landlords.

A child born here will be active, stubborn, and hot-tempered.

December 10.—A good birthday; business and domestic affairs prosper. Those in employ will be promoted.

Girls should make new friends; if engaged they marry.

The day is favourable for most things; buy, sell, visit, engage servants, and marry.

A child born to-day will be affectionate, cheerful, generous, brave, and will rise in life.

December 11.—Many unexpected events are indicated for those whose birthdays come to-day; attend to the health, and keep the affairs well in hand.

Young girls will need much care and prudence in love matters; attentions from married men.

The day is one on which to go quietly; let others make the first move.

A child born this day will be moody, cautious, and cunning. It will be fond of pleasure and the opposite sex.

December 12.—An unsettled year; danger of heavy losses; much anxiety.

Girls meet with disappointment through opposite sex; they should place little faith in any promises.

The day is not good for pleasure, marriage, buying, selling, or changing residence.

A child born here will be improvident and dislike work. If a girl she will be unhappy in marriage.

December 13.—A favourable year for business; much activity and movement. Beware of law and quarrels.

Rather a dull time for girls; they need care with letters and in speech.

The day is good for doing business with farmers, builders, and elderly people. Be careful in signing papers and agreements.

A child born to-day will be active, thoughtful, and clever. Will be fond of travel, of science, and figures. The wit will be keen and sarcastic.

December 14.—Rather a fortunate year for health and business; avoid new enterprises and promising things.

Girls will find love matters quiet, but should be cautious where they place confidence.

A child born here will be rather fortunate in life, but be subject to many ups and downs. Will be fond of travel and change.

December 15.—This is a bad birthday, and promises much anxiety over business, money, domestic affairs, and health. Go quietly and use great caution. Insure against fire and accident.

Girls meet with obstacles and crosses in love affairs; engagements are broken; much care and prudence will be needed with opposite sex.

The day is evil for most matters. Beware of quarrels and mishap.

A child born to-day will be restless, crafty, improvident, and a wanderer. Will need constant care and firm handling.

Asturel.

"I WONDER," muttered young Mrs. Perry, jerking a hat-pin from the cushion, "if I'll ever in this life possess suitable and seasonable things to wear?"

She thrust a hat-pin rather viciously through the dainty summer creation that crowned her head.

"One would suppose I didn't know," she indignantly told her reflected image, "that a trim tailor-made dress and walking hat are the correct dress for autumn. One would suppose I didn't realise how shabby and out of taste is this absurd combination of summer hat, winter skirt and odd spring jacket. But what use to know these things, when one has no money?"

She sighed despairingly and rummaged in a box for her oft-cleaned tan gloves. The sight of them lying beside a small pile of newly washed neck ribbons provoked a fresh burst of scorn.

"Oh, the littleness of it!" she cried bitterly. "To spend one's God-given energies in cleaning and mending and turning and dyeing—all because of a miserable, soul-pinching lack of money."

Catching up gloves and pocket-book she passed into the sitting-room of the little flat.

"Be sure to take good care of Freddie while I'm gone, Dora," she adjured her cousin, who bent above her school book, the two-year-old youngster playing at her feet."

"I'll try," was the rather weary answer. "He's always getting into mischief, though, no matter how I watch him."

The mother sighed impatiently. "I suppose," she said aggrievedly, "that I ought really to stay with him. But it does seem as if I might have some recreation once in a while even if it's no more than going to do a little shopping. But then, I'm always made to feel guilty whenever I demand any release from the daily grind."

She kissed the child hastily. "Good-bye, Freddie—mamma's coming back soon. Gracious! how dirty that dress is, and I just put it on an hour ago. I must make him some new things this week. Oh! the hundreds of things crying to be done. Shall I ever, ever have any leisure?"

"It isn't right," she protested, as she hurried along the street, "that any human being should be obliged to waste precious powers on miserly economies and paltry strivings. There should be time for something else than getting meals and making beds and keeping clothes in order. There should be leisure! Time to think and study and develop the higher regions of one's being. Time to appreciate the beauties of the finer things of life. Oh, there's something wrong with the system of things!"

The sight of gorgeous shop windows only accentuated her bitter mood. Mrs. Perry did not possess the philosophy that enables one to enjoy beauty regardless of possession. The display of exquisite garments only filled her with wretchedness.

"It is cruel!" she persisted. "Cruel to be deprived of these things, when one has the taste and the artistic ability to appreciate them so keenly."

It was half an hour later, as she stood at a counter making modest purchases that the sound of a woman's voice near by arrested her attention. There was something exceedingly familiar in the well-modulated tones.

Glancing up, she saw that her surmise was correct. The perfectly appareled woman who stood looking at silks was no other than a friend of her girlhood.

The recognition was mutual. The friends moved towards each other with outstretched hands and glowing eyes.

The Human Way.

A Little Tale
for the
Discontented.



"Why, Clara! Is this you?"

"And you, Margaret?"

Then followed the rush of questions and comments most natural under the circumstances.

"Come with me," said Clara Eberly, drawing Mrs. Perry from the counter; "we'll go to my hotel, where we can talk over old times to our hearts' content. Shopping can wait for a day or two."

She was so sweet, so cordial, so like the Clara of former days, that Mrs. Perry forgot for the moment that her dress showed a disheartening contrast to the exquisitely fitting gown of grey.

Once in the street, however, the realisation smote her. A

hansom was waiting for Clara. The two women got into it, and again the questions and comments ran on.

It was but a few minutes' ride to the hotel. Mrs. Perry followed her friend into the handsome entrance, trying very hard not to be envious.

"And now," cried Mrs. Eberly as they reached her room, "we can have a cosy afternoon all by ourselves."

She rang the bell and ordered refreshments.

"Do sit back and relax and forget if you can all about the duties waiting for you at home. I shan't listen to your going under two hours at the least. Dinner to get? Oh! well, can't you let it go for to-day? There! Perhaps it is thoughtless for me to talk so. You see, I have no responsibilities whatever. I've lived in hotels ever since I married. Howard is out of town so much, it really wouldn't be sensible to keep house. And then I travel with him most of the time."

Mrs. Perry leant forward impulsively. "What an ideal life!" she cried. "Just what I've always wanted. You have leisure—time to think and study and see the world and accomplish great things. Oh! Clara, you should be very thankful."

Mrs. Eberly laughed rather helplessly. "Accomplish great things!" she repeated. "Why, Margaret, I don't accomplish anything. If you ask me why, I am sure I cannot tell. All I know is that I am constantly on the go and yet I do nothing. My life is absolutely of no use to the world. Doesn't it sound dreadful? Especially when you think of my essays at school on the subject of higher living and all that. I'm sure you must be shocked—"

"I'm not shocked, but greatly astonished. I thought—I was sure—that having money and opportunities would make a difference. You don't have to spend your forces worrying about dress—"

"Dress! 'Tis the bane of my existence. That is just it. The tailor and the milliner and the modiste and all the rest of the terrible train take up so much of my existence that I sometimes long to cry out for release. Fashion makes greater demands upon women every year. Oh, it's a problem! I don't pretend to know the solution of it. But I sometimes yearn for a simple, quiet life—for a life utterly free from all this foolish frippery and nonsense. I would like a little home that I could care for myself. Oh! what joy I would take in making it sweet and attractive for my husband! And I would be willing to wear simple clothes and to have only a few of them—numerous clothes are such a burden—and I would be happy—oh, so happy!—for to me that would be living."

On her way homeward an hour later Mrs. Perry gazed musingly at the shop windows.

"Strange!" she sighed. "People always want what they do not possess. And somehow I really believe Clara meant what she said."

Angela Morgan.



THE STORY OF THE WEEK.

SEE OUR COLOURED COVER.

A
WOMAN'S
TROTH.A True Romance of the
London Stage.(The real names of the chief
persons concerned are well
known to you.)

Two Meet Strangely.

"You'll be wise to spare me a minute, Mr. Prout, you will, indeed! Take the word of a desperate man for it. 'Tisn't likely John Horrocks is going to do without so much as the price of a pint and see you swaggering round as if you was a lord, instead of a cheeky young actor as can't act, when all the time, if he only cared, he could ruin you—ruin you, you mean hound!"

A shrug of the shoulders was the only answer to the threat so savagely concluded, and its object, a tall, dark, rather slight figure in irreproachable frock-coat and glossy "silk," went on buttoning a glove indifferently. The other, a well-built but slouching personage of a superior working-class type, stepped up closer, so that his raised voice might not carry across the gloomy, flagged alley in which they stood, to a low, plain entrance hard by. A pane of the unlighted lamp above it bore, in red letters, the inscription, "Stage Door."

"Come," continued the speaker, roughly, "are you going to give me a pound or two, or are you not?"

"I am not!" he was informed. "You lost your situation here—a situation that I obtained for you—through your own drunken habits, henceforth I shall do nothing more for you, threats or no threats."

John Horrocks, late "property-master" at the Crescent Theatre, gnawed his large, drooping moustaches.

"So that's your tone, is it?" he said. "I've got to bring you to heel, Mr. Lewis Prout, have I? That's not difficult. Suppose I was to write a polite note to pretty Miss Audrey, eh?"

He pointed significantly in the direction of the stage-door behind them. On either side of it, in staring capitals, was billed a woman's name—that of "Miss Audrey Cowper."

"A polite note," pursued the ex-property master, "mentioning that I happen to know the whereabouts of poor Mr. Walsh?"

Lewis Prout started. "She could tell you that much herself," he retorted, "some wretched country gaol. I forget the place." Horrocks grinned.

"Not much," Prout was assured, "his three months is up. He's out again, and in London, poor beggar. I saw him yesterday in a fourpenny doss, a common lodging-house, he didn't see me, but I made certain it was him. He's as much down on his luck as I am. And yet it'd not matter to her if she knew I'll bet. She always swore he was innocent, ay, and believed it, too. Shall I drop her a line, Mr. Prout? She loved his little finger better than ever she'll do your whole body!"

Slowly, very slowly, Lewis Prout put a hand in his pocket and took out a couple of half-crowns. "There," he said, "that's for the last time. Dare to trouble me with another

request for money and I will have you arrested as a persistent and objectionable mendicant."

He flung the coins into the ex-property master's palm, and turned away. A stride, and he had disappeared within the stage-entrance of the Crescent Theatre. John Horrocks slipped his booty into a shabby purse.

"The stingy bully!" muttered the ex-property-master. "Five bob instead of five quid, and he'll have me arrested, will he? And perhaps I shan't have something to say when I'm in Holloway, oh no, perhaps not!"

Thus grumbling to himself, Horrocks moved out of the narrow alley that led to a great West End thoroughfare. As he left the neighbourhood of the stage-door, Lewis Prout, watching him slyly from the shelter of that dingy portal, uttered an oath. John Horrocks had come face to face with a piquante little lady, whose rich furs, smart Paris hat, and costly jewellery seemed to lend a sudden brightness to the dull autumn day.

"Audrey!" murmured the actor, "he—he must not speak to her in his present mood. But no, he was merely trying to bluff me, he dare not, he dare not."

The phrase died on Lewis Prout's lips. John Horrocks had stepped in front of the new-comer.

"Miss Cowper," he was saying, hesitatingly. "Miss Cowper, may I be so bold?"

The little actress paused.

"Why, it's Horrocks!" she exclaimed. "Dear, dear, you know I'm so sorry about you, Horrocks, and your wife and children. But you've been forgiven so often that they won't hear of my interceding for you again. You really do get terribly drunk, Horrocks!"

"Yes, miss," admitted the ex-property-master, "I do; miss, and it's been my ruin in more ways than one." He leant towards her, so closely that she shrank, involuntarily, from his beery breath. "You've always been kind to me, miss," he added, confidentially, "do you know, I could tell you something—something you'd be rare glad to hear—something about—"

A hasty clasp was laid on Horrocks' arm, and he was violently displaced. His interrupter was Lewis Prout.

"Here!" observed the actor, and his voice had a curious gasp in it, as if of suppressed excitement, "We can't have you worrying Miss Cowper with your eternal troubles. If you're all that hard-up I'll see what can be done for you myself. Meanwhile, take that!"

He had a coin in his fingers—Horrocks perceived that it was a sovereign, and snatched at it greedily. Prout motioned him sharply to begone, and, with a doubtful air, and a thoughtful glance at Audrey Cowper, Horrocks pocketed the piece of gold and slouched off.

"I'm afraid Horrocks was beginning to be unpleasantly familiar," said Lewis Prout, as he stepped back towards the stage-door with the dainty, fur-clad figure at his side. A popular beauty, and the one real "star" of the Crescent company, Audrey Cowper was yet, and in full daylight, a young, sweet-faced and natural woman. Hers had been a rapid success; a year or two before she had been a struggling girl-actress on tour in the provinces.

"Yes," she answered, a shadow of disgust crossing her expressive features. "I was not sorry that you intervened at that particular moment."

Lewis Prout held open a swing-door for her to pass into the dusky recesses of the theatre. "I esteem myself fortunate," he observed, meaningly, "that for once my appearance was not disagreeable to you."

Audrey sighed, and quickened her own steps across the dark and draughty stage towards the stair which led to her dressing-room. The actor kept determinedly by her.

"Please, Mr. Prout, don't let us talk about that any more. I have told you that what you wish can never, never be. I

cannot even deny that the sight of you will always cause me pain when I—when I think of poor Mr. Walsh."

Prout ground his teeth.

"You are obstinate in your self-deception," he snarled. "Stephen Walsh was guilty. If I prosecuted him it was to show him to you in his real colours."

The actor drew out a flat silver case and took a cigarette, closing the spring of the case with a snap. Audrey Cowper stopped, with her foot on the lowest stair.

"Mr. Prout," she responded, "you say you care for me, it is false. If you did you could not stoop to torture me in mean, unmanly ways. You are never tired of—of toying with that case—of reminding me that—"

"That Stephen Walsh, your lover and *protégé*," said Prout, bitterly, "went to gaol for three months for stealing it from me. The only decent bit of acting he ever did in his life was when he very nearly convinced those sleepy country magistrates that he was the victim of a plot. A plot—ha, ha! Why, the fellow was worth so little, even as 'general utility,' that he was always hard-up. He pawned the thing, as you know, for a few shillings."

The bright, womanly countenance, so familiar to London playgoers, looked steadily into the sullen visage of Lewis Prout.

"Let us end this once for all," she answered; "I have borne with you, Mr. Prout, because you are not the only person who, blinded by a horrible combination of circumstances, believes Mr. Walsh guilty, and also because your unfortunate passion helps to embitter you. But I will bear no more; speak to me again of Mr. Walsh or of your supposed affection for me, and I will see that either you or I leave the company. Judge for yourself if it is likely to be me."

She caught up her skirts and went proudly up the winding stairs to her room. It was still early in the afternoon, but she had some instructions to give to her dresser respecting the alteration of a costume. They served as an excuse for momentarily dismissing the woman. Left alone, Audrey sat down in a wicker chair and wiped away a tear or two.

"Poor Stephen!" she murmured. "Oh, why, why, didn't you write to me, why don't you let me know where you are?"

She opened a drawer and took out a photograph. It was that of a young and gallant face with kind, grave eyes, and sensitive, clean-shaven lips. Audrey kissed these last impulsively, then put away the portrait.

Four or five months previously, Stephen Walsh and she had been in the same touring company—it had been his first experience of "the profession." She had coached him in his parts, he had been her loyal, faithful cavalier—they had ended by falling in love.

Then there had happened a strange and terrible thing. Stephen had been accused by Prout of stealing a silver cigarette-case, the matter had been placed in the hands of the police, and, horror of horrors, Walsh had been identified by a local pawnbroker as the person who had pawned the case in question on the morning following its disappearance.

The case had been a cheap one—worth about a couple of guineas—and Stephen had been summarily sentenced by a country bench of magistrates to three months' imprisonment. These three months had brought her fame, and their end had blotted out her gladness in a bitter pang. Stephen had left his prison without communicating by word or sign with his betrothed, though she had written to him, in care of the governor of the gaol, sending him money, and telling him that she believed as passionately as ever in his innocence. Her duty at the theatre prevented her meeting him on his liberation, but she begged him to come direct to her in town. The request had received no answer, the money had been returned, the governor wrote, by Stephen's own desire. Audrey dried another and yet another tear as she vainly rebelled against that stern silence, which she understood all too well. He had refused to fasten upon her the stain that had fallen on his own life and reputation.

At length her dresser returned, and, with a sigh, Audrey rose, descended the stair, and passed out of the theatre.

Someone followed her, she glanced round and saw Lewis Prout. He stepped abreast of her and commenced to mumble an apology.

"Miss Cowper—Audrey," he stammered. "I—I didn't mean to—to offend you, really. If I didn't love you so desperately I should be able to bridle my tongue. Say you forgive me, won't you?"

Audrey Cowper answered him coldly; she was walking so rapidly that he had to hasten to keep up with her. Already they had gained the more public streets—a turning brought them in sight of Piccadilly Circus.

"The only thing you can do to gratify me, Mr. Prout," she said, "is to relieve me henceforth of your company, except upon the stage. Surely you will not deny me the privilege of choosing my own friends!"

"That is to say," retorted the actor, angrily, "that you do not choose me for one?"

"Certainly not," said Audrey with spirit, "since you put it that way. And as I have some shopping to do in Regent Street, I cross here, so you can take the opportunity of saying good-afternoon."

She gave him a haughty little nod and stepped off into the roadway, to hasten across. Confused by the interview so abruptly terminated, she did not look carefully to her path, and, in an instant, found herself in a medley of vehicles. Avoiding a brougham, she darted before a motor-car, escaped it by a hair's-breadth, and plunged under the very noses of a bus-team. Her foot slipped on the greasy wood-paving, a second more, and the iron-shod hoofs would have been upon her.

All at once she felt herself seized by a powerful hand, that snatched her out of danger in a twinkling and steadied her gently upon her feet. The last of a line of sandwichmen, passing by with a highly-successful play advertised upon their boards, had darted forward and rescued her in the nick of time. Swinging round to protect her from the traffic, the horses of the bus came heavily against him—he recovered himself with difficulty.

A cry broke from Audrey as she saw his face. "Stephen! Stephen!" she said, and the two, oblivious of the world about them, gazed each at the other. Shabby, moustached, dejected as he was, she recognised in the sandwichman her lover, Stephen Walsh, and hung upon his arm.

"Allow me," intervened a harsh voice, "the lady is in my care."

At the sound the sandwichman turned, still limping from the shock of collision with the bus-team. Lewis Prout had crossed the road and approached them. The passers-by began to linger, a policeman drew near.

Stephen Walsh's eyes flashed fire as he looked at the speaker. "Is that so?" he demanded sternly. The question was addressed to Audrey and there was something in it that struck her to the heart.

"No, no, a thousand times no!" she murmured; "he has persecuted me ever since—oh, Stephen, Stephen!" she whispered, "my poor darling, why did you not take the money I sent you?"

Lewis Prout was hailing a cab. "Miss Cowper," he said, "you are shaken even if not hurt. Allow me to see you home."

The sandwichman was tottering curiously and he had grown very pale. But he drew himself up and answered fiercely. "Stand back!" he exclaimed; "this lady is my promised wife and she confides herself to me!"

The actor stared, amazed at the cultivated speech and masterful tone. "You—" he began, then recoiled suddenly. "Great heavens!" he cried; "Stephen Walsh!—a gutter-bird and in this get-up."

**SPLENDID
CHRISTMAS
DOUBLE
NUMBER NEXT
TUESDAY.
2d.**

"Yes," added Audrey, maintaining her hold upon the shabby shoulder; "and in it he has just saved my life."

There was a low moan from the sandwichman, and, without warning, he collapsed. Audrey flung herself on her knees beside him—he was in a dead faint, and a pool of blood was forming round his right foot. One of the iron hoofs from which he had snatched her had caught him, cutting the flesh of his ankle to the bone and severing an artery. Audrey wrung her hands.

"Is it a case for the hospital, ma'am," asked the policeman, coming up, "or only a faint?"

Before she could answer, someone stepped out of the fast-forming crowd, knelt down, and, with a dirty handkerchief, began to make a tourniquet for the injured man's limb, stopping the flow of crimson fluid. It was Horrocks, the ex-property master.

"Excuse my chipping in, constable," he said, "but this poor fellow is bleeding to death. Well, I'm blowed—Miss Cowper!—Then it was you as was nigh under the 'bus!"

Audrey gasped, staring incredulously from her unconscious lover to the ex-property master of the Crescent theatre.

Now that both were moustached, unkempt, and stamped with the dread hall-mark of poverty, the faces of Stephen Walsh and John Horrocks were almost counterparts.

A Question of Identity.

"PLEASE, Mr. Walsh, do sit down for a few moments. Your foot cannot be really healed yet and Audrey will be so vexed when I tell her how disobedient you have been."

Stephen Walsh laughed and continued his restless striding up and down the small, cosy apartment. He was a very different figure from that which he had presented a week or so earlier, when he had plucked Audrey Cowper from under a London omnibus. Clean-shaven once more, well-groomed, and correctly-dressed, he looked his old professional self, the self that had gazed back at Audrey out of the photograph in her room at the theatre.

"It is a luxury to be able to walk about again, Mrs. Cowper," he answered, "and besides, it helps me to be patient."

His critic—a little, white-haired lady in a brown satin gown, sighed and went on plying her big bone knitting-needles. "Audrey said twelve o'clock," she responded, "and it is nearly that now, so you haven't long to wait. She will be back from the theatre herself soon—there was a new song to try over or something and she had to go."

Stephen Walsh stopped in his irritable progress and leant over the couch where the other sat.

"Mrs. Cowper," he said, "what if the test doesn't turn out right? It's a chance, you know, and if the result is adverse it may spoil everything. I have allowed Audrey to stake recklessly upon a fortunate issue. She has lent—that is to say, given—me money, helped to nurse me, treated me as if our engagement were still a binding reality. And all the time I am a convicted criminal, supposed to be in a public hospital. It is but hoping against hope to dream that I may be able to prove my innocence. Proof, that is what we want, confessions are useless, coincidences useless—proof, proof!"

The old lady placed her withered fingers on his arm. "Courage, Mr. Walsh," she told him, "and as for Audrey, you mustn't be too proud, you know—Audrey owes you her escape from terrible injury, possibly death. Then she knows you to be innocent, and it would break her heart to turn her back on you because you were in trouble. S-s-sh! that is her step, remember, she has forbidden us to talk of the subject."

"Still on your feet, oh, you bad, bad man!" said a gay voice, and Audrey, her cheeks glowing from the keen air of the crisp autumn day, hastened into the room. She put her hands on her lover's shoulders, pushed him into a chair, and kissed him gaily.

"Mummy doesn't mind, do you, mummy?" she laughed; "and now, dear, keep a stiff upper lip, and hope for the best. I've got Horrocks with me—regularly transmogrified—and the other gentlemen, I believe, are in the parlour."

"Yes," said her mother anxiously, "they arrived ten

minutes ago, I suppose the detectives thought they would be in plenty of time."

Audrey threw off her furs and went to the brass bell-pull beside the fire-grate. She paused and returned to her lover.

"How handsome you look without your moustache," she observed, "you'll be back on the boards before long, winning a reputation for yourself." She stooped and gazed into his eyes. "Stephen," she whispered, "you know, whatever happens, it won't make any difference—to me!"

Stephen covered his face—he could not speak. Audrey started away with a great air of cheerfulness and rang the bell.

"Ask the gentleman who is waiting in the hall to step up," she told the maid who answered it. The girl disappeared and they heard her descend the stairs. A moment afterwards a tall, well-dressed man entered the room, carrying a smart Homburg hat in his fingers. It was Horrocks, the property-master, almost unrecognisable in his present attire. He was clean-shaven and his skin had been sponged over with something to give it the brown smooth look so characteristic of the actor.

He came forward awkwardly and an exclamation burst from Stephen's lips. He had glanced towards a mirror—the two faces reflected there were more marvellously alike than ever. In shabby clothes, with limp, dark moustache, Stephen Walsh had been like John Horrocks, now John Horrocks was like Stephen Walsh.

The ex-property master fumbled with his hat. "You see it all now, sir," he said; "it was a dirty trick and worthy of him as put me up to it and sent me to pawn his blessed cigarette-case at a pawnbroker's near your diggings. But I bore you no malice, sir, though I did let him bribe me, and I'm doing what I can to set it straight, for Miss Audrey's sake."

Audrey intervened. "There's no time for apologies," she exclaimed, "you made those once for all, Horrocks, when you came to us and confessed. Let us have in the detectives and that little Jew of a pawnbroker."

She brought a soft hat of the Homburg shape from a side table, gave it to Stephen, and touched the bell again. "We'll have up the people from the parlour," she said to the maid. The latter descended once more and the three in the sitting-room waited. Audrey's hand stole to her lover's and pressed it encouragingly. Then the door opened and a stout man entered, with quick, black eyes and greasy curls on his temples. Behind him were two others in heavy, plain garments and big boots. They saluted Audrey respectfully.

"Now then, Isaacs," said one of them, "here are the two gentlemen who are not unlike each other. Which is the person that pawned the case with you?"

The Jew studied thoughtfully the two well-dressed figures. Finally he shook his head.

"Let them speak," he remarked, turning to the detective who had questioned him; "let them ask me what I will give on it." The police-officer glanced at Stephen, who parted his dry lips with difficulty.

"What—what can you allow me on—on this cigarette-case?" he faltered. The Jew knitted his brows and looked at the other of the two persons confronting him. The ex-property master put out his hand, as if laying some small article on the counter.

"How much on that?" he demanded. The Jew struck his fat palms together.

"That is him!" he ejaculated, "the very man it is. I will swear to him in a million. And the other is the gentleman I swore to at the police-court. I made a mistake, I see it—that is the one, the one with the rough voice and the yellow teeth."

Stephen Walsh sat down suddenly on the couch from which he had so recently risen. Audrey sprang to him. The chief detective motioned to the pawnbroker.

"That will do," he said; "we've other fish to fry and you can be off, Isaacs, for the present."

The Jew shrugged his shoulders and went towards the door. As he did so a peal from the house-bell below reached their ears and Audrey started from her lover's side, Stephen Walsh was already recovering from his momentary faintness.

"There is your man," she said sternly, "get behind the door, inspector, I told the maid when I came in that I expected him. She will show him right up. The fool!—he thinks he is to lunch with me. I wrote him that at last I saw Mr. Walsh in his true colours."

The detectives obeyed, drawing the Jew with them and pulling the ample portière to hide themselves.

"Mr. Lewis Prout," said the maid, appearing suddenly in the room, and stepping aside for the actor to pass. Audrey moved forward and Prout came to take her hand.

"I—I was more than delighted, Miss Cowper," he observed, "to receive the extremely kind little note you left at the theatre."

He stopped—a forefinger tapped him on the back. "Lewis Prout," he was informed, "I arrest you on a charge of committing wilful and corrupt perjury, at Lichbourne petty sessions in July last, during the hearing of a charge of theft against Mr. Stephen Walsh."

The actor faced about—his visage had blanched from brow to chin. His glance fell on the almost identical figures of John Horrocks and Stephen Walsh. Then he darted towards the former.

"Hang you!" he cried, "you blackguard, you've betrayed me."

"Yes, you mean cur," said the ex-property master, "and rightly an innocent man."

Lewis Prout raised a clenched fist to strike him. But there was a sharp click and a pair of steel bracelets pinioned the actor's wrists.

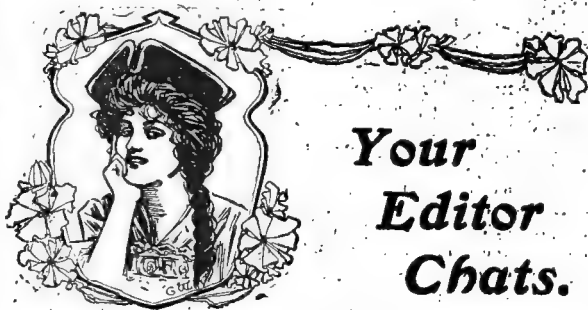
The penalty for perjury is no light one, and only a day or two ago, at the assizes in an old county town, Lewis Prout was sent to prison for as many years as he had caused Stephen Walsh to spend months in gaol. Stephen was not vindictive but a prosecution for perjury was the one effective fashion of ridding his reputation from the stain Prout had placed upon it.

John Horrocks' confession and co-operation with the authorities of Scotland Yard secured him from proceedings of any sort and Audrey is to see that the ex-property master and his family have a new start in a British colony, where Horrocks may yet overcome his tendency to look upon the wine when it is red.

Puzzling as was the perjury case in question to the general reader of the newspapers, a section of the public knew all about the affair before it reached the publicity of a definite hearing. This may explain why Stephen Walsh, on returning to "the boards" in the new Crescent Theatre piece, in a very modest capacity, has had a most enthusiastic reception. Inspired thereby no doubt, and by the presence of Audrey—whom he had privately made his wife at a Strand registry office—Stephen achieved a genuine little success, and is, at present nightly adding to his laurels. There is even some talk of the librettist and composer doing for them a special "sandwich-board duet," which may yet take the town by storm.

It must however be confessed that Audrey is not Audrey Cowper at all, but Miss—, and Stephen is not Stephen Walsh but Mr.—. Nor do they play at the Crescent, but at the — Theatre. And what they will think when they see all this in print had better not be asked.

R. Norman Silver.



Your Editor Chats.

By the time you turn to this page, you will doubtless have read the first instalment of our new serial story, "The Albert Gate Mystery." Well, how do you like it? Having read the whole of the story myself, I personally think that it is the strongest and best story which Mr. Louis Tracy has ever given to the reading public. But as in the case of our last serial, I am extremely desirous of knowing your own individual opinions in the matter and if you care to drop me a line I should very much like to hear how the opening instalments of the story impress you.

OUR CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

Now, just a word as to our Christmas Number. As I told you last week, this is to be a Double Number, price twopence, and will be published next Tuesday. Experience has taught me that there is bound to be a large extra demand for this issue; I would therefore ask you in your own interests, as well as in mine, to order your copy from your local newsagent early. Then he will be prepared to supply you with your copy and we, in turn, shall be prepared to supply him.

LOVE PROBLEMS SOLVED.

In our Christmas Number I start a new series of which I told you some time ago. This is the Love Problem series. Instead of dealing with such problems by means of argumentative articles on such a subject as, let us say, "Should a husband keep a secret from his wife?" I have had several pretty little stories written which answer such questions in an interesting and far more convincing manner than any amount of argumentative chatter. Next Tuesday's problem will be: "Ought a Man to Give up all his Bachelor Pursuits upon Marriage?"

Those of my readers who sent letters of congratulation to Miss Madge Morris upon the occasion of her marriage, and are anxious to know whether their names are among the lucky hundred and one prize-winners, will be glad to know that their suspense will be allayed next Tuesday, when the list of successful competitors will be published.

Your Editor.

SPLENDID ❖ CHRISTMAS
DOUBLE ❖ NUMBER ❖
NEXT ❖ TUESDAY ❖ 2d.

MR. AUGUSTUS SNIPER stood in his second-floor back bed-room surveying himself in a small looking-glass. He was arrayed for conquest and contemplated himself with a smile of complacency.

His necktie was most correct, his coat was a marvel of tailoring though somewhat aggressively new, as was also the rest of his attire down to his crimson socks, but here the newness suddenly ceased, for on his feet were a pair of the most disreputable old boots which have ever been worn since boots were invented.

That they had once been patent leather was apparent, but of their former elegance, their white stitching and pristine brilliancy there was now no sign. They had been patched, sewn, blacked, inked, scratched, battered, trodden down at the heels, and kicked out at the toes to such a degree that a coterminous would have refused to convert them into a "flower for the dinner table," even accompanied by a shilling, when they had reached half the state of dilapidation in which Mr. Sniper wore them.

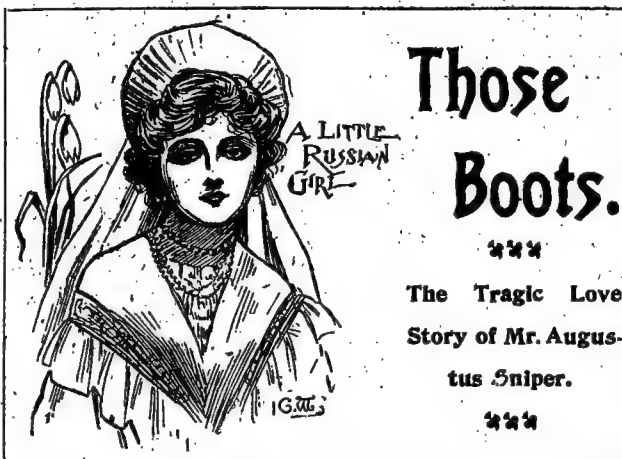
And why did he wear them? Among his friends, his boots were a constant source of "envy, hatred, and malice;" his toes were the most pointed, his fit the most perfect, his leather the most shiny, and his fashion the newest. His lady friends talked of them and one of them had even been known to refuse a man because "his boots were not to be mentioned in the same breath with Mr. Sniper's, and she had once seen him wear one, that was patched."

But then no one ever saw him in the boots he wore in the privacy of his bedroom. Such toes as he showed to an admiring world were not compatible with the broad foot he unquestionably possessed, and the agony they made him suffer was only to be allayed by wearing those comfortable old friends in his moments of retirement from the stage of suburban society where he played no unimportant part in his own estimation.

Having surveyed himself carefully, beginning at the top and only lamenting that the new fashion in ties precluded him from wearing a breast-pin, his glance at last rested on his crimson silk socks, and the boots. As he eyed the latter he gave a chuckle and looked with pride towards a pair of irreproachable "patents" which stood on his chest of drawers in a state of immaculate brightness and glass-like hardness.

"It wouldn't do to forget to change them," he said with a grin; "by Jove, what would the dear Katie say? Why, my chance would be clean gone directly. It's only the other day I heard her say to Jack McDonald that she thought a man who did not wear patent leathers was not fit to be spoken to, and a patch was perfectly inadmissible in a lady's drawing-room. And if she was to see these! Oh, it makes me all of a flutter to think of it. Now I must be cool. What shall I do to calm myself? I know; I'll read that book she lent me, it will do to open the conversation with." So he sat down in his easiest chair and began to read.

The book, however, was very exciting, and he never noticed the time till the clock struck four, the hour he should have been at his adored one's house. So, with an exclamation which one couldn't exactly say to a Sunday school class without having difficulties with the superintendent, he hastily glanced at himself in the glass, picked up his carefully-brushed hat, and hurriedly left the house. Fortunately his destination, the house of Dr. Gunn, was not far off, and in six minutes, he was standing on the doorstep waiting for the door to be opened that he might be ushered into the presence of his Katie,



Those Boots.

The Tragic Love
Story of Mr. Augustus Sniper.

to whom he meant that very afternoon to offer his hand, his heart, and—his boots.

He heard the welcome footsteps of the housemaid, and his heart was beating high with expectation when—looking downwards—he saw he had forgotten to change his boots.

There was no time to retreat, already the door was open, and, before he could collect his thoughts, he found himself in the drawing-room in the presence of his divinity and several other visitors of both sexes.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come, Mr. Sniper," said Katie, a pretty girl

with sparkling dark eyes and a neat figure, as she hurried to meet him at the door. Then she lowered her voice to say: "Such a nuisance those people coming."

"Er—er—not at all—er—I assure you—I—" he stammered convulsively, too much unnerved by the discovery of the state of his feet to have the slightest idea of what she was saying, beyond a vague idea that she was apologising for something.

Katie gave him one look of contemptuous anger and turned away without another word. When a pretty girl tells a man she is glad to see him and in the same breath laments that anyone else should be present, and he answers as Augustus Sniper did, is it anything to be surprised at that she feels mortally offended?

So Augustus was left stranded by the door where he had entered, too much overcome by the paralysing fear that someone would look at him and discover those boots to heed Katie's anger or to be aware in what way he had offended her.

However, he dared not remain in the open space and, seeing an ottoman, he determined to reach it or perish in the attempt. Happily it was near Mrs. Gunn, which afforded him an excuse to go to it. Where he stood, he felt as though he was on the edge of a fearful precipice, any moment someone might look round, there was nothing for it but a rush. He rushed. Happily he was able to pull himself up in time and avoid tumbling over Mrs. Gunn.

"How do you do, my dear Mrs. Gunn?" he gasped, shaking hands with her violently, hoping thereby to draw her attention from the eccentric manner in which he had crossed the room.

"How do you do?" she answered coldly, adding to herself: "If it were not so early in the day, I should say that man had been drinking. I hope he has no vicious habits. He comes here very often. I must drop a hint to Katie."

Here the conversation languished. Augustus remained wrapt in his own thoughts, which were far from pleasant. At last he decided he would outstay every one, propose to Katie, and then, if accepted, he would be asked to dinner and would make his escape under cover of the night, and if refused, well, it would not much matter then whether she saw the boots or not. He was suddenly aroused from these reflections by hearing Mrs. Gunn say: "Won't you sit down, Mr. Sniper?"

And awakening to the fact that he had been standing all the time in silence, he seated himself on the ottoman. But he had put himself in the worst place in the room, viz., next to the tea-table. Presently Mrs. Gunn again spoke. "Ah, here is the tea. May I trouble you, Mr. Sniper, to take this cup of tea to Miss Neville. She is at the other side of the room near the window."

There was nothing for it but to go, so with a cup in one hand and a plate of cake in the other, he started on his perilous journey. Behind the sofa, round a fat old lady, between a

lady and gentleman in the midst of a flirtation, occasionally darting in a zig-zag course from the edge of a curtain to a foot-stool and back again to the vast outlying flanges of some old dowager, gingerly skirting the groups of laughing, chattering girls, he made his erratic way, taking advantage of every cover with the care of a Boer, and at last reached the farther end of the room where sat Miss Neville in the bow window.

"At last," he said to himself as he handed her the cake, "I've done it, but I wouldn't go through that again for £1,000." And he sat down beside Maggie Neville, determined nothing should move him from his haven.

"What a cosy place you've got over here, I thought so directly I came in, so I got Mrs. Gunn to let me bring you your tea and come over here for a talk."

"Did you? I watched you crossing the room, but I could not tell where you were going."

He turned hot at the bare idea of his being watched. Had she seen the boots?

"Did you—er—did you notice anything—er peculiar—about—me?" he stammered.

"No," she said wonderingly, "except perhaps, your manner of walking. You didn't look as if you were trying to get here."

"Oh, that's nothing—I often—er—do that. It's a way I've got."

"Indeed."

This was not encouraging, anything to turn the subject, he rushed on: "But I assure you, Miss Neville, now I am here, I could wish for no greater happiness than to remain here for ever. At least, that is to say, until you go away."

This was perfectly true.

"I'll leave a little margin for your politeness, Mr. Sniper, and won't consider you bound by that," she said with a laugh, and then added slyly, "what would the others—what would Katie say if you sat here all the afternoon?"

"I don't care what they say. My present position is the only one to give me happiness. I would not exchange it for a throne," he said with fervour.

He was getting desperate. Anything to keep her attention from his boots, and all these speeches which she took to mean a sudden desire to get up a flirtation, were no empty compliments, but terribly true expressions of his painful position.

Meanwhile Katie was watching him with great wrath. What did he mean by this behaviour? She was not going to stand such treatment. He had not once looked at her, and now to see him flirting with that minx Maggie Neville was more than flesh and blood could put up with.

"Here is your tea," said young McDonald at this moment, "can I fetch you anything to eat, Miss Gunn?"

"Yes, please; I should like some cake," she answered, fixing Augustus, who still held the plate of cake, with her eye.

"Where the dickens can it be gone to?" he muttered some minutes later, after hunting high and low. "Well, I'm blessed if there isn't Sniper hugging it on his knee, I'll go and interrupt him."

And he went in Sniper's direction. Poor Augustus saw him coming and moved a little closer to Miss Neville, hiding his feet under the edge of her gown, little thinking all this was perceived by Katie. "The wretch," she said to herself, and when Jack McDonald returned she flirted desperately with him, keeping one eye on Augustus, however. "Well, Mr. Sniper," said Miss Neville in answer to one of his pretty speeches; "since you say your pleasure is in serving me, will you be so kind as to fetch me another cup of tea."

Poor Augustus!

"Of course, my greatest pleasure is to serve you, Miss Neville, but—er—when that service—er—necessitates my leaving you—er—being deprived of your society, I cannot fly to accomplish your wish as I would otherwise do—" He had the cup in hand, and was balancing it idiotically and he stammeringly sought an excuse for remaining where he was.

Just at this critical moment a friend passed at about the distance of a yard and a half, here was his chance

"Thomson," he said, reaching over to touch him and nearly overbalancing as he did so, "Miss Neville says will you get her a cup of tea, please."

Thomson, who had long worshipped Maggie Neville, flew off with alacrity on this errand.

"Really, Mr. Sniper, this is going too far," said Miss Neville in an offended tone; "if you did not wish to get my tea I would not have you do it for worlds, but I think you need not put speeches into my mouth."

"My dear Miss Neville—not wish to get your tea? I assure you—I—" And then a happy idea struck him. "The thing was, I knew that fellow wanted to come and join us—and I—er—I—didn't want him. Sec."

Just then Thomson returned, carefully steering his way across the room with the desired cup of tea.

"Thank you, Mr. Thomson," she said with a gracious smile; "it is lucky you've come as Mr. Sniper has declared he can no longer keep away from Miss Gunn and I shall be left all alone."

Poor Augustus!

Thomson beamed, and there was nothing for it but for him to rise and give up his seat and make his way to Katie.

"Oh that I had skirts," he groaned, "why wasn't I born a woman?"

By this time many of the guests had departed and to cross the room was a matter of still greater difficulty than before. However, by making darts, when no one was looking, from cover to cover, he at length managed to place himself behind his beloved Katie's chair. She, however, took no notice of him but continued chatting gaily with Jack McDonald. So there he stood (sitting was out of the question) in silence, till the last guest had departed and when Katie returned from bidding them good-bye at the door, he advanced and said: "I am so glad all those bores are gone."

"You have the advantage of me there," she said haughtily.

He ignored this remark and continued:

"I've been waiting to speak to you all the afternoon, Miss Gunn; Katie, you know what I've come for—I want to tell you—"

"Please tell me nothing, Mr. Sniper, after your disgraceful behaviour this afternoon nothing you can say will have any interest for me."

"But, Katie, listen to me—you know I love you, have always loved you from the first time I saw you and I thought you did not dislike me."

"Sir, you force me to speak more plainly. In short, your language to me in the state you are in, after your outrageous flirtation, is nothing short of an insult. A gentleman does not come to ask a lady to be his wife and begin by flirting with someone else, nor does he expect to be received in respectable houses when he cannot even walk straight, nor does he," as her glance travelled downwards, "come to pay a visit in such boots."

Augustus fled. Poor Augustus!

L. Hughes.

GUEST: "How is this? My bill this time is twelve shillings a day, and last December I had the same room and it was only ten shillings a day." Clerk: "Yes, I know; but the days are much longer now."

"I don't think Mr. Bunker is much of a conversationalist," observed Miss Elder. "Well, he came to me last night," replied Miss Young, as she carelessly twirled a new ring on the third finger of her left hand, "and I found his conversation quite engaging."

Young Farmer Medders (at supper): "What in Heaven's name is the matter with the cake, Gloriosa?" Bride (a London girl): "Why, darling, there can surely be nothing the matter with it! I followed the recipe exactly. Maybe it was the fault of the eggs. I thought eggs were soft and yellow inside, but these were white and brittle all the way through, and I had to powder them with the flat-iron, and—" "Where did you find them?" "In the hen-house, darling. There was only one egg in each nest, and—" "Gloriosa, you have used my china nest-eggs!"

ASTOUNDING SOCIETY REVELATIONS.

BEGIN TO-DAY.



LADY PEGGY
CARSTAIRS

HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.



BELINDA

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS. A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.

BELINDA NORTH. The beautiful daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.

CRAWLEY DRUMMOND. Lady Peggy's old friend and adviser.

DUKE OF EASTACRES. A comparatively penniless suitor for Belinda's hand.

DUCHESS OF EASTACRES. His mother.

LORD REGINALD DAVENANT. Another of Belinda's suitors.

DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

SHEILA KENWYN. Forbes' cousin, whom Eastacres has wronged.

LADY HONORIA. The Duke's sister.

STANLEY FORBES. A famous barrister, who visits Cairo.

HOW LADY PEGGY FINDS BELINDA.

LADY PEGGY undertakes, for the sum of twenty thousand pounds, to chaperon Belinda, and to marry her to a son of some old and titled family. Staying at the same hotel in Cairo, are the Duke of Eastacres and his mother, the Duchess. Lady Peggy and the Duchess agree that nothing could be better than a union of the Duke's title and Belinda's millions; everything is therefore done to bring this about. One evening, under the guidance of a fine looking Bedouin, they all go to witness a religious festival. They manage to arouse the wrath of the fanatics, but are delivered by the dragoman, who turns out to be David Carr. Belinda signifies her gratitude by publicly hugging him.

The dragoman is dismissed, and back at the hotel the Duchess of Eastacres takes Lady Peggy to task for the occurrence. Lady Peggy retorts that not long ago she saw the Duchess' own daughter Honoria in the arms of a real Egyptian. The Duchess is furious, calls Honoria, and after storming at her, is slapping her face when Belinda rushes in, rescues Honoria and takes her to her room. Shortly afterwards a fearful shriek is heard, followed by an impassioned appeal for "Help!" The voice is Belinda's!

Rushing upstairs, we discover that Belinda has just prevented Honoria from poisoning herself.

The next evening, Lady Peggy discovers the Duke of Eastacres and a new comer, Stanley Forbes, about to fight a duel. Realising the possible disastrous consequences to her matrimonial plans for Belinda, Lady Peggy rushes forward and places herself between the two men.

Sending Eastacres off on some errand, she takes Forbes aside, and after telling him she knows that the quarrel is connected with a girl named Sheila Kenwyn, whose whereabouts Forbes wants to find out, promises to extract the address from Eastacres if Forbes will forego a scandal. Forbes consents.

Lady Peggy then finds Eastacres and refuses to allow his suit with Belinda till he gives her the address. Eastacres gives it.

Later on Lady Peggy is rewarded by discovering Belinda in the Duke's arms.

She is congratulating them both when Belinda breaks out in a torrent of rage with the Duke, whom she states she hates. Lady Peggy then tells her that her action in allowing the Duke to caress her in public will be taken by Society as tantamount to an engagement, otherwise she will be put down by Society for a forward and impossible girl. Belinda is then persuaded to agree to an engagement for a month, after which it is to be broken off. David Carr is told of the engagement but not of the length of its duration.

Everything is now being got ready for the Khedive's Ball. Belinda is to be presented, and Lady Peggy tells her that she must wear her necklace of pearls. Belinda replies that they are lost, and adds that Lady Peggy would be sorry to know who had taken them.

Full of this fresh trouble Lady Peggy goes to the Duchess' room, and is entering when she sees the Duchess, who is unconscious of Lady Peggy's presence, and Honoria in the middle of the room, and in the Duchess' hand Belinda's pearls.

The Khedive's Ball and Belinda's Triumph.

So overwhelming was my surprise that I was within a hair's breadth of betraying myself. So tense was the situation, so breathless my expectation as to what strange scene I might be about to witness, that I could barely command myself to silence.

How did the Duchess come to possess Belinda's pearls? I feared the explanation while on the tip-toe of desire to learn it.

The Duchess broke the silence.

"What do you want?" she asked her daughter sharply.

Honoria crept a little nearer, her mouth twitching, her whole frame expressive of terrified suspicion.

"Mother!" she laid a shaking hand upon the other's arm, "those are Belinda's pearls."

"Well?"

"How did you—when did you—oh!"—the thin hand dropped from her mother's arm and clasped its fellow convulsively. "Belinda lost them," she gasped, "she said so, and when she told me she looked at me so strangely I felt uncomfortable. I—mother, give them to me, I'll take them back. Oh, dear, oh, dear, what shall I do?"

The Duchess gazed at her in cool contempt.

"Stop behaving like an infant if you can," she replied. Then, with a sudden rush of indignation—"A pretty state of things when my daughter tells me to my face that she's been suspected of taking a person's property and doesn't even change colour! Had you any spirit you would have shown the girl her proper place. Look at you strangely, indeed, the daughter of the Duke of Eastacres! What next?"

Honorina showed no resentment at this unexpected turning of the tables. She only gazed the more intently at the pearls.

"Belinda—" she commenced again with timid insistence, "Belinda—"

"Belinda gave the pearls to me to take care of," her Grace snapped. "Pray, is there anything very remarkable in that?"

"Why did she tell me she'd lost them?" urged Honorina, with more courage than I had thought her capable of showing.

"For the same reason that other people tell you absurd things—because you've no sense. Don't argue with me; you've no sense, and that's the beginning and end of it all. Go back to bed at once, it's all you're fit for. To think," the Duchess glared fiercely at the girl, "to think I should have an idiot for a daughter."

Under this shower of words Honorina's strength succumbed. She was so accustomed to blame and to reproach that it had become second nature to her to bear them meekly. She retreated ignominiously to her bed-chamber, and the Duchess safely locked her in.

Having routed her opponent. Her Grace placed the pearls upon the table and gazed at them with an air of pride, not to say appropriation, that filled me with alarm. Supposing she refused to give them up, whatever could be done?

After a few minutes of ecstasy, however, the enjoyment appeared to pall. She walked away from the table towards the bed. Stooping with some amount of pain and difficulty, she drew from under the bedstead a small black trunk, evidently of considerable weight. Having placed the box in a position favourable to the examination of the contents, the Duchess drew up an armchair, seated herself, and produced from her capacious pocket a small bunch of keys. Selecting one, she fitted it into the lock, turned the bolt, raised the lid, threw it back upon its hinges, and slowly drew forth, one by one, the articles the box contained.

The next five minutes were amongst the strangest, most thrilling of my life!

From the box in front of her the Duchess drew forth one by one things of the most varied description, ranging from a gold bracelet to a shoe-horn, and including a pair of steel scissors and a diamond buckle! All sorts of unconsidered trifles were added to the rapidly increasing pile beside her, an ivory-backed hair brush, an oxydised waist-belt, a pair of *pinces-nez*, a cigarette case, a pocket-knife, nut-crackers, a silver serviette ring, a writing-case—my mind could not keep pace with the pile. I gave up cataloguing in despair, and resigned myself to a feeling of intense bewilderment.

This condition of mind, however, was soon dissipated. Her Grace, nearly at the bottom of the box, selected a small tissue paper parcel for examination, and proceeded to unwrap the covering. I watched intently, and as the thin folds of the paper gradually revealed the thing inclosed, I was hard put to it not to call out.

In the Duchess' lap lay a fan, an exquisite, hand-painted trifle in white satin and ivory, my fan, the gift of Lord Lesborough when he was at the Embassy in Paris.

In a minute the mystery of the box and its contents was plain to me as daylight.

The Duchess, the Duchess of Eastacres was a kleptomaniac! I remembered with a sudden flash of understanding, certain peculiarities of her Grace's. Now were made plain

to me the uses of the capacious reticule she always carried. Attached by a stout chain to what was once her waist, the Duchess and her bag had furnished amusement to our set these many years.

To think how many of our pet belongings that respectable reticule had swallowed!

Really it was too much. She simply should not have my fan. So great was my indignation that to insure my self-control I was obliged to retire from the room. I couldn't look at her in silence any longer.

The cool air of the corridor brought me composure. It was necessary to act quickly, sharply, but with the greatest possible tact. The pearls—if possible, my fan—must be obtained from her Grace that night. The operation, however, would be a delicate one, and would require the nicest handling.

On one point, however, I was much relieved. From what Honorina had said it was evident that Belinda had suspected her of taking the pearls. Loyalty to her friend had prevented the girl telling me of their loss. This same loyalty would prevent her mentioning their return. It was a great mercy it was Honorina whom she suspected, not—anybody else.

I quickly settled my plan of campaign, and with a calm front walked smartly down the corridor, paused outside the Duchess's door, and tapped with emphasis upon the panels.

Immediately all was silence therein. The rustling of paper ceased as if by magic, there was no stir nor sound. A second later and the faint ray of light that streamed under the door disappeared—the Duchess had switched off the electric light.

I softly retraced my steps and waited some short distance off, in order to give the Duchess time to readjust the—well, the black trunk beneath her bed. After a suitable interval I again presented myself, and knocked as before.

No answer, still silent, still dark. At this I lost my patience, and rapped loud and long upon the door.

"It's I, Duchess, Lady Carstairs," I explained reassuringly.

"Whatever is the matter? I'm asleep, I can't see anyone to-night."

For answer I recommenced my rapping, and continued it until, in self-defence, her Grace appeared upon the threshold.

"So sorry, Duchess," I said sweetly, adroitly slipping past her substantial form. "I wouldn't have disturbed you for worlds if I'd known. I never thought you went to bed as early as this?"

"Early," said her Grace, with an unpleasant smile, "it's long past midnight."

"My dear Duchess," I glanced at the clock, "why, so it is! Dear me, my watch has stopped! I must apologise profusely. I came to see you about such a trifle, too; it could easily have waited till the morning. Pray forgive me, it's an atrocious thing to have done; I thought it was not yet eleven."

"As you are here," said her Grace, somewhat grimly, "what do you want?"

"May I stay a little while?" I said evasively. "That is very nice of you. Really, this fire is very pleasant, it's quite cold to-night." I drew up a chair and settled myself snugly among the cushions. The Duchess, seeing I was not to be put off, resigned herself to the inevitable, and took a seat opposite mine.

"I've just been trying on Belinda's dress," I remarked. "I had it specially made for the Khedive's ball. Worth designed it himself. She looks perfect—really, she's very lovely, Duchess!"

The Duchess nodded. I thought I discerned a faint





"What does the woman mean by maundering about a girl's first ball at such an hour?"

"That reminds me," I sat bolt upright, meeting the steel grey eyes that so unflinchingly regarded me with so stern a gaze. "I came here to speak to you about the pearls. I understand *Belinda* gave them to you to take care of!"

The Duchess gasped, changed colour, cast a threatening look towards Honoria's door, and then, with courage and calmness rarely equalled, rose to the occasion.

"Oh, yes," she said, "she brought them here to me a day or two ago. She's rather young, I think, to have the charge of such valuable things, don't you?" As she spoke her Grace advanced to the dressing-table, opened a drawer, took out a leather case and handed it to me.

I opened it; with joy I saw that it contained *Belinda's* pearls!

My success inspired me to make a further effort. I determined to try and secure my fan. In my eagerness I forgot one all important point. The pearls had lain at hand, their reappearance entailed no dragging forth of grisly skeletons in the shape of black trunks filled with other people's property.

Not so the fan, it lay in the deepest depths of that black box. I was destined never to hold it more.

"Do you remember, Duchess," I continued, when we had finished admiring the necklace, "do you remember that lovely fan Lord Lesborough gave me? I mislaid it, you know, and it has just occurred to me that I may have left it in your room the night we returned from that dance at the Gheyhezah Palace, just about six weeks ago. Have you come across it?"

"I remember the fan perfectly," said her Grace. "You did not leave it in my room. You—" she gave a grim, hard smile, "you gave it me downstairs in the vestibule; at least, I understood you gave it me. I had forgotten my own fan, and you requested me to use and keep yours in its place."

For the moment I was too astounded to do more than gaze in wonder and astonishment. Positively she was marvellous! With a nervous little laugh I hastily disclaimed all desire for the return of my gift, and, bringing two interviews to a somewhat hurried close, parted with her Grace the best of friends.

All the same I smarted with the sense of my defeat. I had *Belinda's* pearls, but the Duchess kept my fan.

Next morning I took the opportunity of *Belinda's* absence to replace the necklace in her jewel-case. She made no comment then or after as to its return, and what, if any, explanation Honoria gave, I do not know.

For the remainder of our stay at Cairo the Duchess kept her kleptomania severely in check, so far as my property was concerned, which was, all things considered, as well for both of us. The incident had passed off wonderfully, but had the Duchess been treated with indiscretion or a lack of tact, I shudder to think what might have been the consequences.

Her Grace, if anything, was more impolite to Honoria after the occurrence than before. Indeed, that unfortunate young woman had fallen upon rough days, and, but for

Belinda's sustaining influence, would, I think, have quite lost the small remnant of intellect she still retained.

Mark Striven, when not engaged in gambling, horse racing, or billiards found considerable amusement in tormenting his *fiancée*. He would subject her to a searching cross-examination, and so bewilder the poor wretch that she returned astonishing and impossible answers to the simplest questions. I had heard or seen nothing of the Egyptian person—*El Hamed*—as Honoria called him, and was beginning to think he had vanished from the scene. I was, however, deceived in this particular, as I shall tell you.

Late one night, or to be quite correct, very early in the morning—I was returning to my room from Midge's apartments. About six or seven women of our set used to congregate there once or sometimes twice a week to talk scandal, make bets, play cards, eat and drink. There were no men admitted—the most stupid of men are apt to be critical, and at times a woman doesn't want to be criticised.

Play always runs high among women; for some of us, indeed, gambling with cards is not sufficiently exciting. Betting is a more feverish and fascinating form of speculation. What bets have I not seen lost and won! Nothing is too trifling to form the subject of a wager. I was present on the night the young Duchess of M—, just newly married, lost twenty thousand pounds to the Marchioness of A— all over a raindrop! It was a wet day, and a few splashes of rain had fallen on the window from the coping up above. Two drops in particular attracted attention as they slowly glided down the pane.

"Twenty thousand that this drop reaches the bottom first," cried the Marchioness.

"Done," answered her friend.

The two watched the insignificant globules slowly meander the length of the window amid immense excitement. As I say, the Duchess lost, and paid, the wager.

Bets didn't run quite so high in Cairo; there would have been a difficulty in cashing up so far from home. But they ran into a big sum all the same, and, failing ready money, jewels, furs, laces, and even clothes, were available.

On the evening in question Midge was very unlucky. She had staked her set of sables on the certainty that the buttons on Mrs. Courtney's black silk dress were odd in number. Little Lady Saxby booked the bet against her diamond bracelet. A visit to Mrs. Courtney's apartment—she was a most respectable old lady, wife of a clergyman—revealed the fact that there were twenty-four buttons and two hooks and eyes. The good woman was horribly frightened at our incursion into her bedroom; she thought we were burglars, and begged us to take all she had and spare her life!

After that Midge grew reckless. She dropped a thousand over the length of time a match would keep alight, and literally throw away a Brussels lace scarf on the assertion that my eyes were blue! I had a special liking for that scarf, and when Lady Saxby declared that she was ready to wager the lace and fifty pounds against my chatelaine that Honoria would not marry Mark Striven, I closed with the offer.

"It's more than probable that the marriage will take place before they leave Cairo," I said. "The Duke mentioned it to me the other day."

"They're leaving in a week?"

"Quite so. A week is time enough to get married."

Lady Saxby laughed. "You'll have to hand over your chatelaine, Lady Peggy," she said, "Within a week Honoria will take the law into her own hands. She's going to elope! Oh, no," as I started to my feet. "I'm not going to let you into the secret—I've a particular fancy for that chatelaine. I overheard her ladyship and your dear, innocent *Belinda* discuss the matter, that's how I know. Honoria was intensely affecting—quite dramatic, in fact. She flung her arms round the girl's neck, and prayed Heaven to bless her. These were her very words. Imagine poor Honoria! 'It seems too good to be true,' she said. 'If only I can get away to *El Hamed* how happy, how happy I shall be!' And then—" Lady Saxby smiled at the remembrance, "then she fell to kissing and crying over *Belinda* till I felt quite sorry for her.

It's bad enough to be kissed by a woman at all. But a *damp* woman—ugh!" And she shuddered at the thought.

I felt alarmed, as you may suppose, at the intelligence. Really, the Eastacres family were very trying; no sooner had one scandal been averted than another threatened. Of course Honoria's elopement must be stopped, otherwise the Duke's chances with Hardy North might suffer. All the same, I did not see for the moment how it was to be done.

At this moment Midge, having lost all her money, and most of her jewels, declared that she must go to bed.

She was not much troubled at her losses; the husband in Chicago would quickly furnish her with supplies. Other women, of course, are not all so fortunate; their husbands not being in Chicago, are inclined to interfere with their wives' personal expenditure. Not that marital authority ever stops women betting with each other. There are many ways of raising money in Society. The easiest and safest, perhaps, is the following:

Have you ever met a smart woman, titled, may be, and turned out to perfection, at a suburban "At Home?" A function given by wealthy and respectable, but entirely plebeian persons. Have you not wondered what the *aristocrate* was doing in that place? The explanation is simple in itself. She graced the "At Home," imparted style to the occasion for so much hard cash, the fee ranging in proportion to her rank and to her host's banking account.

There are always plenty of people who will gladly pay a high price for a distinguished guest; for the matter of that, there are several agencies in the West End of London who make it their business to arrange the matter.

I retired to rest, as I say, troubled about Honoria. The fact that in place of my peignoir I found a smoking jacket on my door did not improve my temper. It was an amiable practice of Reg and various other kindred spirits to misplace our things on the evenings that we women met together. It was not an uncommon thing to find a snake, harmless, but none the less alarming, in one's water jug, or for an empty meat tin to fall with an awful clatter on one's head from over the door. Crawley was just as foolish as the youngest and silliest of them all. I recognised the smoking jacket as his property, and spent a good half hour in sewing it up into an impossible shape. My maid took it to him next morning with my compliments!

It wanted three days now to the Khedive's ball. Those three days I gave up to watching Honoria and pumping Belinda. Neither process gave me any information. I was in doubt how best to act. If I questioned Belinda outright as to the proposed elopement, it would, I feared, only precipitate matters. She would tell me nothing and warn Honoria. The same fear held me back from consulting the Duke. He would fall so heavily upon his sister that from sheer fright she would break into open rebellion.

I decided to communicate my suspicions to Mark Striven. He heard me in silence, then, with a horrid sort of laugh, thanked me for my warning.

"Within the next week, Lady Peggy? Is that it? Well, I think I can name the date more exactly than that. The night of the Khedive's ball you will find is the evening my fair cousin has fixed for the elopement. She shall meet this El Hamed right enough—only I shall be there to keep him company. Leave it to me, Lady Peggy, and thank you very much."

Mark Striven was certainly a sensible person. I felt much relieved at his assurance, and turned my thoughts and attention to Belinda and myself. I had had another letter from Hardy North expressing intense satisfaction in regard to his daughter's engagement. He proposed to meet us in Paris, where we were going on leaving Cairo, and hoped to arrange for Belinda's speedy marriage.

I also received a note from Stanley Forbes—as did Belinda. He told me he had found Sheila at the address I gave him, and thanked me for my help. I did not see Belinda's epistle, but from a letter she wrote him which I came across and read, I gathered he had asked for particulars in regard to

her feelings towards the Duke, and had hinted that his Grace was not all he seemed.

I promptly burnt Belinda's answer; it would never do for her and Stanley to compare notes upon the Duke. And then I waited in nervous anticipation for the evening of the ball—the evening which would decide Belinda's future.

All my tact and cleverness had been brought to bear upon the situation. The Duke aided me in the best possible manner. Belinda would be congratulated, *fêted*, complimented at the ball, on her engagement; all that flattery and homage could do would be done. A girl must be more than human, I thought, to resist the influences thus brought to bear on her.

The occasion would be her first introduction to an important function. She would realise, for the first time, the prestige accorded to rank, the honour paid to a distinguished member of Society like the Duke.

Something of awe and trepidation stole over the girl as we drove to the Palace. She seemed to shrink from the ordeal through which she had to pass, to draw back from the gamut of criticism she had to run. She looked more than ever like a nymph from a Greek fable, tall, straight, fair, her neck and arms gleaming white, her plentiful brown hair, coiled in classic fashion low on her neck.

The Duke met us in the great hall of the Khedive's Palace. He looked very distinguished, and Belinda for once lost a little of her self-possession as he conducted her up the wide low stairs to where the Khedive received his guests.

The colour came and went in her cheeks; the splendour of the scene, the admiration of the men, the envious looks of the women, affected her as I had hoped they would.

It is a gorgeous affair, the Khedive's ball. The rooms are hung with roses, wreaths of the flowers festoon the walls, twine round the pillars, hang in fragrant masses from the ceiling. Innumerable lights—the Palace is lit by electricity—twinkle among the flowers. The air is heavy with scents full of the romance of the East. Egyptian officers high in the service of the Government throng the place, their gorgeous uniforms in strange contrast to the black coats of British diplomatists. British officers, brave in scarlet and gold, are much in evidence, and there is a good sprinkling of American civilians.

This year the assemblage was more than usually distinguished. Quite a number of our set were at Cairo scattered among the various hotels, and they all put in an appearance.

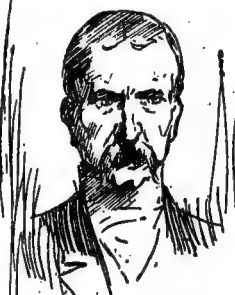
Belinda promenaded the rooms, the Duke in close attendance.

Her progress was a slow one. Every now and then the Duke would stop, and, with a courtly bow, ask permission to present this one or that among his friends to Belinda. And on each presentation followed a little congratulatory murmur, a reference to her engagement, a wish for her happiness.

The colour deepened in her cheeks, her eyes grew restless, she glanced round fearfully, casting anxious looks at me. She had not dreamt of *this*; the congratulations, the compliments, filled her with terror. It was as though a chain were tightening round her, a chain that each moment grew more difficult to break.

It was a fierce ordeal—an impossible ordeal. How could any girl stand out against the forces directed against her? How could she proclaim that she was not in need of congratulations, that she was not going to marry the Duke?

It was an incredible idea. I smiled and thought how cleverly I had arranged it all. Here in the midst of all that was brilliant the figure of David Carr must needs seem plain—existence with him would be a very different matter from life with the Duke!



THE DUKE OF EASTACRES



A steady, monotonous future was all that he could offer—that and his love.

The Duchess murmured her satisfaction, forgetting in her pleasure to unduly snub Honoria. Her Ladyship was looking quite presentable, in a pretty gown of pale pink silk. The colour was kind to her skin, which did not look so sallow as usual, and her hair was very nicely done. She was in a great state of nervous tremor, and cast quick glances round the room in search apparently for El Hamed. I was gratified to note that he did not arrive.

Towards the end of the ball, when the success of the evening was at its height, the Khedive made known his desire that Belinda should be presented to him.

An *attaché* made his way down the room and informed me of the royal decree. My heart beat so fast that it was painful. The presentation of Belinda would prove the critical moment. How would Belinda behave? On her action hung the issue of her future and of mine.

£20,000—the price of a peaceful old age—my old age trembled in the balance.

That old and distinguished diplomat, Lord Melrose, presented her. The Khedive gazed at her in open approbation. Then with a charming smile—he is a singularly fascinating personage—entered into conversation.

"Did she like Cairo?"

"Very much," she answered quietly.

"You will be leaving shortly?"

"Yes, your Majesty, to my regret."

"Ah! but you are going to be very happy. You are going to marry this gentleman?" He glanced at the Duke. "He is to be envied. I wish you every happiness." The Khedive smiled, the Duke bowed. Belinda, crimson from brow to chin, remained speechless. I thanked Providence for her silence, another minute and it would be too late for her to speak. Too late, it would be impossible. She—

Belinda threw up her head, and advanced towards the Khedive. Then in a clear voice, audible to the whole room, made the following astounding statement. Think of it, a young girl of seventeen having the courage, the will, to openly defy the custom, the conventions of Society!

"It is very kind of you to give me such good wishes," she said simply, not at all as though she addressed a Prince, "but—but—" she paused, "I am not going to marry the Duke," she said. "I am not wise enough, nor clever enough. In fact, I will never marry him, your Majesty."

And without waiting to witness the effects of this moral bombshell, Belinda retired into the crowd, and from thence made her way into the ante-chamber, leaving me to bear the murmurs, the comments, the shocked surprise of the assembly.

I could have screamed in my mortification and my rage. To be set at naught by a chit like that, to have my schemes overturned, my future jeopardised by a girl in her teens!

I took a hatred to the girl. Henceforth I would deal differently with her. She should learn that I was not a woman lightly to be turned aside. Plans for the future I could make in plenty, but for the present I was weighed down with the sense of defeat.

My first attempt at marrying Belinda had failed!

Eager to escape from my friends I hurried towards the room where Belinda had taken refuge. One had to pass through an archway to reach it. Unconcealed by draperies or curtains, the interior of the room was in full view from the other side of the arch.

The Duke had followed Belinda, and they were in deep conversation. I wished much to hear what they were saying.

Just a few feet from the archway, however, the Khedive approached and began to talk about Belinda, her beauty, her strange, not to say startling, conduct.

I was standing sideways, half facing his Majesty, half conscious of what was happening in that other room.

At length he turned to speak to an *attaché*—etiquette forbade me to move but permitted me to use my eyes.

I glanced quickly at Belinda and the Duke. They were on opposite sides of the apartments, she close to the windows, long French windows, opening on to the Palace grounds, he facing her, speaking with energy and force.

Suddenly through a door to his right the figure of a woman, closely veiled, stole into the room. Had she made no sign but steadily walked by him, she might have gained the window and passed through unchallenged, but the sight of Eastaerces appeared to terrify her. She uttered a faint cry, clutched her veil, lurched forward, stumbled, fell.

It was the wretched Honoria!

In a minute the Duke had grasped the situation. Honoria was going to meet the Egyptian, to make a last despairing effort after freedom.

With a muttered execration the Duke darted towards his sister.

Belinda rushed between them.

"You shall not touch her, nor hurt, nor stop her. She's going to leave you for ever, to live a free, a happy life. You shall not prevent her."

He waited coolly, quietly, till she had finished, then gently but firmly pushed her aside.

Honoria who by this time had staggered to her feet, was almost within touch of his fingers. Another moment he would have had her in his grasp. But there was still Belinda to be reckoned with. With a swift movement she rushed to the corner of the room where, in Moorish fashion, stood a lighted lamp upon the floor. Snatching it up she stood triumphantly before the Duke.

"Now," she cried, "move a step towards Honoria, and I dash this to the ground." She poised the lamp above her head. "Honoria quick, fly!"

Honoria started, the Duke moved, Belinda brought the lamp level with his face!

(What followed Belinda's action will be told next Tuesday.)

A LITTLE girl, hearing it remarked that all people had once been children, artlessly inquired: "Who took care of the babies?"

MOTHER: "What have you done to your little sister?" Boy: "Nothing." "Then, what is she crying for?" "She's cryin' because she can't think of anything to cry for."

"YES," murmured the bald-headed man, "I've been married twenty years, but my wife and myself never had but one thought in common." "And what was that?" asked the thin man. "Oh, it was when the house caught fire, and we both thought we'd like to get out first."

MISSIONARY: "Was it liquor that brought you to this?" Imprisoned Burglar: "No, sir, it was cleanin'—Spring house cleanin', sir." Missionary: "Eh? House cleanin'?" Burglar: "Yessir. The woman had been house cleanin', and the stair carpet was up, and the folks heard me."

MANAGING EDITOR (to reporter): "Are you engaged to be married, Mr. Scarehead?" Mr. Scarehead: "Er—yes, sir; I—"

MANAGING EDITOR: "Kindly draw on the office for forty shillings, get married immediately, and let me have two columns on 'Married Life in a Great City' by twelve o'clock. And—er—congratulations!"

An aristocratic lady, meeting a beggar in rags, gave him her card, saying: "Here is my address. If you will call at any time you can have some of my husband's left-off clothes." A few days later she saw the poor fellow again in the street. "Why did you not come as I told you?" "Please, ma'am, this is Wednesday, and on your card it says: 'At home on Thursdays.'"



Storyettes.

News to Both.

MAMMA: "What is the matter?" Little Jack: "Me an' sister was playin' keep house, an' I was the papa, an' she was the governess, an' she told me to kiss her, an' when I did, she slapped me hard—boo, boo! I didn't know that was in the game." Mamma (thoughtfully): "Neither did I."

A Search for Pleasure.

LITTLE JOHNNY: "I've got on my new boots." Little Tommy: "So've I." Little Johnny: "Have yer? Let's hunt for a puddle."

The Song of the Gay Coquette.

"I know," remarked the gay coquette, "I haven't caught a husband yet; but then," she added, softly sighing, "I've had some fun while I've been trying."

The Butcher's Way.

A YOUNG woman asked her butcher to weigh the baby. "With pleasure, madam." (After having examined the scales.) "Ah! thirteen and a half pounds, madam, with the bones."

To Amuse the Guests.

HOSTESS: "Dear me, the conversation is flagging dreadfully. What can we do to amuse these people?" Host: "I don't know, I am sure, unless we go into the other room for a bit, and give them a chance to talk about us."

A Kindred Feeling.

"Let me tell you, Mrs. Thomas," said a happy parent to a rustic neighbour, "my son, Ernest, has got a first prize." "Oh! I quite understand your feelings, marm; I felt just the same myself when our young pig carried off a medal at the agricultural show."

The Dream and the Reality.

AFTER dreaming for three years of a fairy prince, riding into town on a fierce charger, with a glittering sword hanging by his side, a Colchester girl is about to marry a man who has a charger that is hitched to a milk cart, and she is doing remarkably well these hard times to get him.

A Thoughtful Spouse.

"I've a good mind to go and jump into the river," said Mr. N. Peck, at the end of a little domestic discussion, as he picked up his hat and started out. "You come back here," said his wife. "If you intend any such trick as that, just march upstairs and put on your old clothes before you start."

Why He Danced.

THERE is a story of an Imperial Highness waltzing thrice in the same evening with an English lady at a Court in Berlin. She naturally felt, and frankly confessed, herself highly flattered by the compliment. "I did not intend it as a compliment," was the answer. "Then," said the lady, somewhat upset, "your Highness must be very fond of dancing." "I detest dancing," was the still unsatisfactory response. Undeterred by her ill success, our fair Englishwoman still prosecuted her inquiries. "What then, may I ask, can be your Imperial Highness' motive for dancing?" "Madam," was the exalted personage's curt reply, "I dance to perspire."

The Lady's Retort.

HE: "Really you must excuse me, but I thought it was Hetty Smith." She: "Well, you're excusable. A man that would want to kiss Hetty Smith is not responsible for his actions."

Easily Surmounted.

MILLIE: "I don't mind marrying you, Clarence, but I hate the idea of giving up my two pounds a week situation at the shop." Clarence: "Then, don't give it up, dearest. I'll give up mine. I'm getting only thirty shillings."

When a Girl Bets.

CLARA: "Now remember you have bet me a box of gloves, and if I win, you must buy me just the kind I like." George: "Yes, and if I win—". Clara: "If you win, you have the privilege of buying me a cheaper sort—if you are mean enough to do it."

Why She Wanted Him Scolded.

WIFE (to her husband): "Arthur, love, I want you to give Jack a good scolding to-morrow morning." Husband: "What for? I am perfectly satisfied with the fellow." Wife: "Well, you know, he has to beat the carpets to-morrow, and he strikes ever so much harder when he's in a bad temper."

True Philanthropy.

"WASN'T it sad about old Jobley's failure?" "What! Has he failed?" "Yes, gone clean smash." "That's too bad. He promised me something yesterday; but now, in his trouble, I will not hold him to it." "That's generous of you. What was it?" "His daughter's hand in marriage."

Sentiment and Business.

YOUNG MAN: "I cannot understand, sir, why you permit your daughter to sue me for breach of promise. You remember that you were bitterly opposed to our engagement because I wasn't good enough for her, and would disgrace the family." Old Man: "Young man, that was sentiment; this is business."

Quite a Little Matter.

As the girl rose from his knee, a look of deep concern appeared upon the young man's face. "Surely, my darling," he said, in anxious tones, "your love has not turned cold?" "No, George," the beautiful girl replied, "I only want to change to the other side; the ticking of your watch unpleasantly disturbs my ear."

Baiting the Situation.

MR. SIDNEY SMITH: "Are you the policeman on the beat near my house?" Police-Constable Toulson: "Yes, sir." Mr. Sidney Smith: "Would you mind standing near our kitchen entrance next Saturday afternoon for a few minutes? We're having some trouble in getting a girl, and I want the one who comes on Saturday to have every possible inducement to stay."

Where Silence was Golden.

"Did you know that I passed your door last evening?" said the young man tenderly. "Of course," replied the beautiful girl, with reproach in her glistening eyes. "Do you think I would not know your step?" "Certainly," said the happy young man, as he directed the conversation away from the subject, and avoided remarking that he passed the door in a cab.

It Would not Harmonise.

"I WANT," she said hesitatingly, as she poised her basket in front of her pretty chin with a thoughtful air, "to get some lettuce." "Yes'm," said the market man; "here's some—very nice it is, too." "Is it all that colour?" "Why—er—yes'm; all lettuce is green, you know." "Oh, it is too bad. I got a lovely blue dish to put lettuce in; but I'm sure green would look horrible in it. I never thought about there not being any shades, you know." And as she turned away the market man was almost sure he saw a tear of disappointment in her eye.



The Wooing of Peggy.

The Difference
between Peggy
Smith and Lady
Vesdris.

"I wish to see Lady Vesdris Pendual." The soberly dressed little man, looked questioningly at the maid servant who opened the door to him.

"Nobody of that name in the house, sir."

"No? You surprise me," he smiled, then added: "However, as I am not blind, I can see her at this very moment playing tennis in that court."

He pointed casually in the direction of the distant lawn.

"That is Miss Peggy Smith, sir. The gentleman she is playing with, being the young master."

The little man coughed.

"Then, my good girl, would you have the kindness to tell Miss Peggy Smith, that Mr. George Brent, Solicitor to the late Earl of Porthawn, would like to see her for a few minutes."

The servant stared, then asking the solicitor into the house, she showed him into the drawing-room and departed on her errand. Brent had not long to wait, for ere many minutes had elapsed, the door opened and a pretty, winsome girl, entered the room, closely followed by the young fellow whom the solicitor had seen playing tennis with her, when he had entered the grounds a short while before. Like his partner in the set, he looked hot and somewhat moist-visaged.

"So you have found me out at last, Mr. Brent," she remarked by way of greeting.

"Um, yes, my dear Lady Vesdris," replied the solicitor, his eyes twinkling with latent merriment. "And a fine dance you have led me, too! To come down to Yorkshire from London is quite an undertaking for a man of my age, you know. Now that I have at last arrived in this very pretty, if extremely out-of-the-way, locality, I should be pleased if you would accord me a few minutes private conversation—alone."

"Well, we are alone, dear Mr. Brent," said Vesdris smiling. "Bert being in the room does not alter that fact for—we, you see, we have no secrets from each other."

"Ahem." The solicitor's eyes twinkled more than ever. "Am I to understand, by that confession, that you are engaged to this gentleman?"

"Not yet," replied Vesdris, hurriedly, before Bertram Wilnot had time to get a word in edgewise. "We—we—"

She paused, then flushing hotly, said, "What was it that you wanted to see me alone for?"

"Ah, of course, I was forgetting the object of my visit in the pleasure of seeing you." The smile died from his lips, as he added, seriously. "It is my pleasant duty to inform you that my late client, the Earl of Porthawn, died intestate, and such being the case, you, as his lordship's only surviving relative, inherit alike his estates in the Duchy of Cornwall and his fortune." He paused, then added, "The title, of

course, lapses though it could doubtless be revived, always supposing that you contracted a suitable marriage."

Vesdris laid a hand on the little man's arm.

"That, Mr. Brent, you know that I should always do," she said, smiling into his eyes.

"I am far from being certain on that point," said the solicitor, a slight note of testiness apparent in his voice. "I remember the time when you told me in all seriousness, that you wanted to marry the gardener's boy."

"But that was when I used to invite you up to the school-room to tea with my dolls, Mr. Brent." Always pretty, she looked singularly winning at that moment.

Brent being merely a man, suffered the smile to be wooed back to his face, as pinching her gently on the cheek, he said;

"Those were happy days, Vesdris, when I used to come and drink thimblefuls of tea with you, and listen to the respective family histories of your dollies! Eh? I little thought then that you would ever have been thrown alone on the world as Miss Peggy Smith. You should have come to my house, little girl, instead of hiding yourself away in the wilds of Yorkshire as a companion. Two years hard hunting it has taken me to find you."

"I knew that you would want me to come to you, if I let you know of my whereabouts," Vesdris said softly. "I did not want to be a burden on you, for I thought that I could earn my own living! Rather than do that, I would have accepted the hundred a year Uncle Walter offered me, when he stepped into everything at the death of my poor father." Her lips trembled ominously for a moment, then steadying, she continued, "I have been very happy here. Everybody has been so kind to me, and Bert has looked after me as carefully as if I were his own sister."

"Perhaps more so than if you were," said the solicitor drily, adding briskly as the young man coloured awkwardly, "Well, I must be off now. I am due at York at two, and—"

"But you will stay and have some lunch," said Wilnot, speaking for the first time. "I know Peggy—er—Lady Vesdris would—"

"Thank you, but I am afraid that I cannot. My train leaves at 12.43, and if the clock on the mantelpiece is correct, I have just ten minutes in which to get to the station." The solicitor spoke briskly. "Good-bye! Of course you must leave here, little girl, at once, and come up to town. You have a lot of documents to sign before you can enter into possession of your own. Let me see, to-day is Monday—I shall expect you at my office not later than Tuesday week. Good-bye! Good-bye! Remember what I said about the title and making a suitable marriage. As you are one of, if not the biggest heiress in England, you have enough money to revive it." And so saying, the busy little solicitor walked to the door and out of the house, pausing at the drive gate, to wave an *adieu*, before he stepped briskly out towards the station. Vesdris closed the door softly, and sped lightly back to the drawing-room, where Bert had remained, with unwonted discourtesy, whilst she had shown her visitor out.

He was standing by the window, his hands thrust down into his jacket pockets, gazing absent-mindedly out into space. So occupied indeed was he in his own thoughts, that he was unaware of Vesdris' presence, till he felt her hand lightly placed on his shoulder.

"Bert," she said wistfully. "You told me this morning that you had something to speak to me about—it was just before Janet came to tell me that Mr. Brent was in the drawing-room."

He turned to gaze at the girl beside him in mute agony.

"Won't you tell me now, what it was you wanted to say to me, dear?"

"No, I am afraid that I cannot," he said hoarsely, as once again he turned to look out of the window. "I—I—to tell you the truth, I—I forget what I was going to say."

"Don't tell a fib, Bert," she said quietly, as putting her arm through his, she laid her head upon his shoulder. "You know really quite well what you were going to say. Won't you tell me—that is, if I really want to hear?"

A faint smile stole over his features.

"You—that is—I can never tell you what I was going to say, now."

"Why?" She raised her head from his shoulder, to glance inquiringly up into his face. "Why won't you tell me now, when half an hour ago you were willing to?"

"Why?" He placed his hands on her shoulders and looked straight into the violet eyes raised half-shyly to his. "A great deal has happened in those thirty minutes—and I wonder if you would be angry with me, if—I said—that you have hardly been quite fair with me."

"Hardly fair. Why do you say that, Bert?" she asked. A faint flush suffused her cheeks, mounting to the very temples where her soft golden hair strayed in unruly curls of gold. "Why do you think that I have been unfair?"

"I don't know why I should have said it," he said, "unless it is, that the world has suddenly seemed to grow cold and bitter to me," he added abruptly, his voice becoming oddly strained. "You came to us as Peggy Smith, nearly two years ago, and as Peggy Smith, I loved you! I—"

"Cannot you see your way to love—Vesdris Pendual as much—as you loved Peggy Smith?" The faint flush mantling her cheeks, deepened into a furious blush.

"It would not be honourable on my part to tell her so, even if I did, and—"

"But you have," she said, a ring of triumph in her voice. "And now will you explain to me why it would not be honourable for you to tell Vesdris Pendual that you love her, when you could do so without dishonour to Peggy Smith?"

"Ah, little woman, cannot you understand," he said fondly. "You are an heiress, and one of the richest women in England at that; whilst I—I am merely the son of a country squire, with a few hundreds to call my own! As Peggy, I might have found courage to ask you to be—"

He paused abruptly, to turn and gaze anew out of the window.

"Yes, dear—to be what?" She glanced up at his face pleadingly. "Bert, to you I shall always be Peggy. Don't let money prove a barrier between us! We have been so happy together, and, Bert, tell me what you were going to say?"

"Vesdris," he interrupted hoarsely, "do you know what you are saying? Do you know that you are tempting me?"

"I want to tempt you, dear," she said, as laying her head on his shoulder she hid her tear-blurred eyes from his view.

"Then Peggy, darling—for I shall always call you by the name I first learnt to love you under—will you be my wife, dearest?"

Though tear-stained, it was a happy face she raised to his, as she replied simply:

"Bert, dear, I shall be the happiest girl in the world if you will only have me!"

"If?" He pressed her closely to him, smothering her resistless lips with hungry kisses. "If? It will be more to the point to say, if Mr. Brent will let me have you."

"I am of age," she said, mutinously. "But somehow I don't think that he will find there is a just cause or impediment why we should not marry, dearest."

Vesdris proved a prophetess. Mr. Brent did not, and when the one time Peggy entered into her own, it was as Lady Vesdris Wilmot.

H. Morton Baird.

SPLENDID @ CHRISTMAS

DOUBLE NUMBER @@@@

NEXT TUESDAY @@@@ 2d.

A GRAMOPHONE FOR AN OPINION.

In order that those of our readers who have not yet managed to secure one of these splendid instruments may still have an opportunity of doing so, we offer ten more of our famous Gramophones this week.

These prizes, as every successful competitor will tell you, are well worth trying for. They reproduce splendidly both the human voice and musical instruments. With each instrument is presented two records, and as a Christmas party entertainer they are hardly to be equalled.

What you have to do to Win a Gramophone.

In *Short Stories* week by week, as you know, are several features, namely—(1) The Serial Story; (2) The Series, "How I Chaperoned Belinda"; (3) In Confidence page; (4) The Birthdays Information column; and (5) Editorial Chat.

I want you to tell me which of these features interests you most, which next, and so on.

What you have to do is to write on the back of a postcard the titles of the features in the order in which you like them best and send them to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., marking your postcard in the left-hand top corner "Feature."

To the ten readers whose opinions most nearly represent the consensus of opinion will be awarded a handsome Gramophone.

All opinions must reach us not later than by first post on Tuesday morning, December 16th.

Result of the "Anagram" Competition.

In the above competition a Gramophone has been awarded to each of the following competitors:

- A. Fortheringham, 6 Greenfield Street, Govan.
- J. F. R. Anderson, 2 West Mayfield, Edinburgh.
- J. Smith, 51 Shakespeare Crescent, Patricroft, Lancs.
- F. McClellan, 3 Mounsey Road, near Tranmere, Birkenhead.
- A. Beoch, 123 Victoria Road, Dundee.
- G. Humphreys, 19 Colville Street, Nottingham.
- C. Payne, St. Aubans, Burlingou Road, North End, Portsmouth.
- F. Gale, 1 Park Place, Cheltenham.
- E. Mill, 12 Green Street, Neath, South Wales.
- R. Wild, care of E. Wilson, 2 Orchard Villas, Linden Road, Ashford, Middlesex.



The Conversion of a Tragedian.

By the Love of
a Woman.

MR. TREADWELL was making a matutinal repast of a slice of

corned beef and an olive, and thirstily watching the concoction of a roseate study in still life, when I first made his acquaintance on a morning two years ago. He paid for his libation and its more substantial accompaniment with the last coin that he possessed, but he did it with the air of majesty which characterised all his movements on and off the stage.

He was presented to me as "Mr. Treadwell, the tragedian," which implied the compliment that he was quite too well known to need any further description.

Mr. Treadwell, the tragedian, was sadly in need of a shave, and there was a haggard look about his eyes which bespoke hard lines of fate. A hair-cut would have altered his appearance greatly, and would have done him no material harm. His long, fur-caped and fur-cuffed overcoat was faded and threadbare, and was kept closely buttoned for the reason, it may be supposed, that his under coat was still less prepossessing to the eye. His shoes, which once had been patent leather, were cracked and seamed, but polished. His hat was not quite new—in fact, there was a bare dent in the back-ground, which, carefully as the nap had been brushed, could not be concealed, but the rim was soiled and bent.

But notwithstanding Mr. Treadwell's seedy appearance, and the fact that he was almost a counterpart of many another stranded actor who has haunted the Rialto in years past, there was something about him which impressed one favourably and held the attention.

"Genius is nothing without opportunity," said Napoleon—and Treadwell had been thus far without the necessary opportunity to raise himself to the heights which he felt entirely competent to attain, and which he was modestly confident that he should attain eventually. For he was ambitious as few men are. Ambition was the warp and woof of his whole nature. It was honest, legitimate ambition, and it was backed up by a tenacity of purpose that was somewhat remarkable, considering the trials and tribulations he had borne in the pursuit of his aims. The spirit of humour and flippancy which characterises the dramatic age was so foreign to his nature that he was unable to understand that there was practically no demand for a new Hamlet or Othello, or Richard III. His world was one of solemnity and earnestness.

Treadwell came into my office one afternoon, looking more seedy than usual, but graver, more austere, and more majestic.

"I have just been insulted," he said, in suppressed, tragic tones, as he sat down in the easy-chair by the fire.

"No trouble, I hope," I said, by way of encouraging him to continue in explanation.

"Well, no; though I should have preferred to have struck the dog down. It was Conrad, the manager of the Metropolitan Theatre, where a crowd of giggling fools are amused nightly. You cannot imagine what the despicable scoundrel said to me. 'Treadwell,' he said, in that patronising way

of his, 'you don't seem to be playing in much luck of late. Hang it, man,' slapping me on the back with disgusting familiarity, 'haven't you found out that tragedy is dead and buried? Heaven help you, sir! The people don't want it and they won't have it. You would starve ten times over while you were convincing them that you were a second Irving. The rattle-headed public wants screaming farce—that's what it wants. That's what it's willing to shell out its silver shekels for, and that's what we must give if we want to live. You've got to come to this view sooner or later, and make the best of the situation. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll give you £10 a week to join my 'Willy Wally' company at the Metropolitan, and appear just as you are, without one bit of make-up. Your duty will be to go on and act your natural self. Why, man, as the busted tragedian you would have the whole town holding its sides. You don't appreciate what a frightful guy you are. You mustn't even get a shave, you know. I want you just as you are. You don't say no? There's a good thing in it for you, old man, and it's the only sensible thing to do.'"

"What did you say?" I asked, amused, but disguising the fact.

"Say," thundered Treadwell, with a magnificent gesture, "I told him to go and boil himself! I was angered as I never was before. Burlesque myself, eh? I wanted to crush him to the earth! 'I may starve, sir, yes, starve,' I said, 'but I will not pollute myself and desecrate my noble art by accepting such a diabolical proposition as this of yours. You are a craven insulter, sir!' And with that I turned on my heel and left him."

"The offer was very ill-advised," I commented, "but perhaps he meant well. You can afford to be charitable. Mr. Treadwell."

I soothed his ruffled feelings as best I could, and presently he asked me to accompany him up the street to Chalmers' Theatre, where there was to be a benefit performance that afternoon.

"Some very good talent—worth seeing," he added sententiously.

I have always been more or less a Bohemian, and the idea of walking up the Strand in company with Gilbert Treadwell had no embarrassment for me. Furthermore I understood my obligations, and we pushed in the well-known yellow doors, and then pushed them out again, before we turned into the foyer of the playhouse.

Treadwell had a passing acquaintance with the man in the box-office, and by reason of his being a member of the "Profession"—a capital P—had no difficulty in securing passes for us both. The inconsistency of asking for tickets for a benefit performance did not seem to occur to him. If every one gained admittance in this way the benefit part of the performance would scarcely materialise.

"Who is the beneficiary?" I asked casually, when we had gained our seats.

"One of the noblest little women that ever lived," he answered warmly. "Ramona Darling. You know of her, of course. She was rarely talented, but sickness and desertion by the man whom she loved have reduced her to absolute poverty."

"Yes, I remember Ramona Darling. In her palmy days, when she was at the height of her popularity, I thought her the most chic and cunning actress on the stage."

I felt almost a personal gratitude to those sympathetic artists who had volunteered to give their time and talents towards the benevolent project of relieving her distress.

The entertainment was made up of a medley of songs, dances, and portions of acts from plays, which were at the time running at the different theatres in the city, and, altogether, was clever and interesting. But the fickle, thoughtless public, unfortunately, had not shown the interest in Ramona Darling's case which it was expected it would, and as a result the audience was not only small, but was composed in greater part of "deadheads," like Treadwell and myself. This incensed the tragedian greatly. The funniest things that were said and done on the stage only deepened his gloom. It

was evident he not only disapproved of the audience, but of the acting as well. He had felt it his duty, however, to show his approval of the benefit, and its object, by lending the influence of his presence to the occasion, and in pursuit of this duty he retained his seat during the whole of the performance.

Just before the curtain went down on the final scene, Mr. Chalmers, the manager of the theatre and the organiser of the benefit, appeared on the stage.

"I am very sorry to say," he announced, "that the proceeds of this benefit amount to a trifle less than thirty pounds. And this sum, I fear, will be required to pay the expenses of a funeral. I have just heard that Ramona Darling is dying."

As Treadwell and I went slowly out of the theatre, I fancied he brushed a tear from his eye.

"If you'll pay the bus-fare, Felix," he said in a strained voice, "we'll go round to her house. I didn't know she was so bad as that. I want to see her once more before she goes."

There was humour in his pathos, for, despite himself, in all that he did, Treadwell was a humourist.

I was quite sufficiently interested in Ramona Darling to cordially agree with his plan to visit her, and in a few minutes we found ourselves ringing at her door. The place was one of the cheap boarding-houses which abound near King's Cross—one of those unpleasant abodes where the co-mingled odours of cabbages and onions salute the nostrils of the visitor as he enters the door.

We were conducted up two flights of stairs and shown unceremoniously into a dim, dull room, where the one time popular little favourite lay white and still upon a by no means luxurious bed. Everything about the place betokened poverty and suffering.

She was attended only by a stupid-looking German girl, who withdrew as we entered. A child, a sunny-haired girl of five, was kneeling pathetically by the bed clasping the white hand of the dying woman, and hiding her face in the covers.

We advanced softly to the bedside, and the child raised her tear-stained face and stared at us inquiringly. The woman opened her eyes wearily, and a gleam of pleasure shot into them as she recognised Treadwell.

"Gilbert," she murmured faintly, with a great effort holding up her hand to him.

He bent and kissed the hand, and groaned as he sank down on a chair beside the bed.

"Ramona," he said tremulously, "I never thought it would come to this. It is not your fault, I know."

He smoothed back the fine hair from her forehead with touch as tender as a ministering angel's, and the tears trickled down his cheeks upon the white pillows.

"The benefit was a success," he went on with spontaneous perjury, "there will be plenty of money now to provide for all your needs. You will be quite well in a week. I—I wanted to see you, and this is my friend, Mr. Felix, who used to write pleasant things about you in the *Age*. I am sure you will be well in a week, Ramona."

"No—no," she responded, "I am dying, Gilbert; oh, God, I am dying."

With a convulsive movement she caught the arm of the child and drew the little one's face close to hers. She held her thus silently for a moment, while the child sobbed as if her heart would break.

"Gilbert," she said, presently, "you loved me once."

He looked up at me and said, half apologetically. "Yes, I loved her once."

Then he fell on his knees beside the bed and continued, brokenly, "I love you now."

He seemed to me like a new order of Othello as he knelt there grief-stricken, unmanned, touched to the heart by this unwonted spectacle of the woman he worshipped, bending to catch the last words that fell from her fluttering lips. He was a tragedian in earnest for once.

"I want you to take her, my little Dollie," she went on.

"Take her and see that she is cared for. She is my only one—mine and—his. I can trust you, Gilbert. She is all I have, and you will—cherish her—for my—sake. Do not let her love—unwisely, as her—mother did. Promise me, Gilbert?"

"I promise, Ramona. For your sake I will do anything—everything."

She sighed with relief, and for several moments lay silent and with closed eyes. Then, with a strenuous effort, she raised herself up and held her white arms aloft as if to pronounce a malediction.

"Never let him contaminate her with his touch," she cried, feverishly and wildly. "Should he come to you, tell him that I died hating him!"

Then she leant forward and kissed Treadwell, and took up the child in her arms and caressed her passionately. The following moment she sank back among the pillows, dead.

I notified the woman of the house, and a few moments later Treadwell and I went out and took a return bus.

Neither spoke. He seemed completely unnerved. When we had reached our destination he told me he was going to make arrangements for the funeral, and bade me good-night. Knowing that he was without money, I offered him a note, but he refused it.

We were almost at the door of my office, and I took his arm and pressed him to go in.

"Now, what are your plans?" I asked. "You are not exactly in a position to assume such a responsibility as you have undertaken. I speak frankly, old man. How are you going to take care of this child?"

"Can't I do it on an income of £10 a week?" he responded. "Didn't I have an offer of that for my services this afternoon?"

"Yes; but——" I began.

"The circumstances are changed now," he interrupted.

He strode majestically out of the door, and that was the last I saw of him for two days. I read the announcement in a daily paper of his engagement for a burlesque part in "Conrad's Popular Willy Wally Company," and I thus knew that his revised plans had been successful.

I had always cherished a certain faith and confidence in Treadwell born, perhaps, of my admiration for his utter sincerity and his strength of purpose in clinging to his tenets against every adversity; now, I began to respect him. I knew what a sacrifice he had made as perhaps no one save himself did. I could imagine what torture the new order of things was to him. For whatever Treadwell's faults and deficiencies, he was a man of artistic soul, whose purposes were honourable and earnest, and whose ideals and standards were of the highest.

For the sake of the mother, the child had become more to him than his own future. He was to care for it, and cherish it, even as he had cherished the hope of his own eventual success. To do this it was no longer possible to continue in the old way; he must have money, and there was but one way open to him to get it.

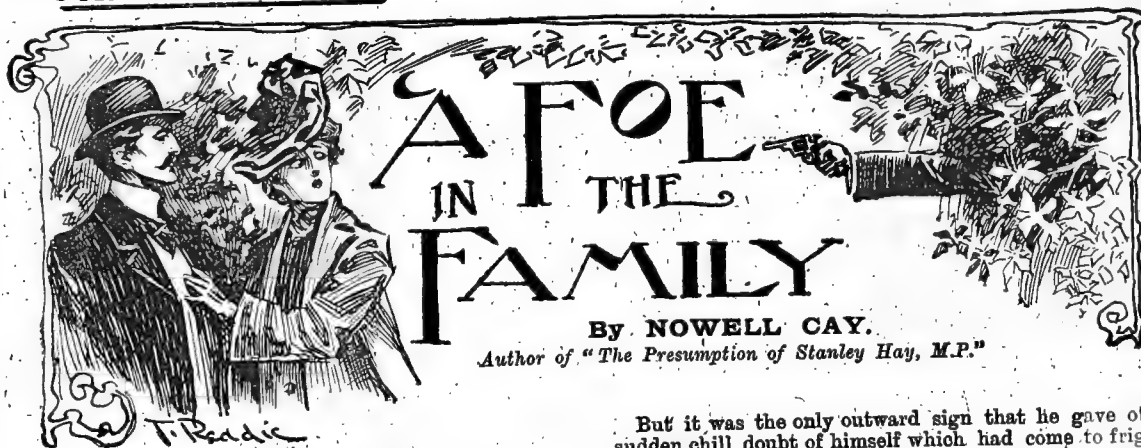
He did not ask me to the theatre to witness his performance; but I went one night, and sat where he could not see me.

Conrad's predictions were well founded. Treadwell was a success. His appearance brought forth a storm of applause, and his extravagant manner was a continual source of merriment. I felt truly sorry for him, knowing what he suffered. There was an expression of the keenest pain on his countenance when the audience roared at his manoeuvres, but it all intensified the humours of the character he so well impersonated, and few suspected that it was not assumed for that purpose.

A day or two afterward he took me to see his new charge. She was harboured in the house of a kind old lady, who provided her with the utmost consideration and care, and took a motherly interest in "the little dear."

She was really the prettiest and sweetest child I ever saw. And as she ran to Treadwell and put her baby arms affectionately about his neck, he kissed her tenderly and smiled. Yes, Gilbert Treadwell actually smiled!

G. Parkyn



Wherein Grant's Hopes are Raised.

THEY still stood in the draped hall where they had met, but for the moment Cathie had forgotten her anxiety for her cousin.

At first she had been bewildered, but as his impetuous string of words allowed her to understand more and more clearly what was in his mind her cheeks flushed scarlet. Her heart beat rapidly with a strange tumult of emotions. She was angry and indignant, and yet in spite of her anger she was pleasantly conscious that the man she loved was admitting his preference for her. He had never spoken so clearly before. She could be almost certain now of something she had half believed, half felt ashamed of believing.

Grant had never looked quite so handsome to her as he stood with flashing eyes and flushed cheeks pouring out his undeserved condemnation. And he had said that he would have given his life for one kind word from her.

But to believe that she was in love with Lord Ilden, an I had acted towards his wife as she had done at the Hall through a feeling of mad jealousy. Her eyes flashed as brightly as his.

She would not condescend to answer accusations so unfounded and unjust, and without a word she turned on her heel.

But as she turned with his denunciatory "where have you sent her?" sounding in her ears she found that they were no longer alone.

Florence had been unable to bear the suspense any longer. Grant must have brought bad news of George or Catherine would have returned to her, and she was now in the doorway.

"You have news of him?" she said appealingly. "Catherine dearest, you will not hide it from me."

Catherine shook her head.

"No dear. Mr. Ilden has heard nothing." She turned to Grant whose surprise showed itself clearly in his face. Catherine's had lost its flush and was quite calm. A strange smile played in her eyes.

"You asked where Lady Ilden was, but gave me no time to tell you that we came here together. By the way you have not yet been introduced to your new cousin. Florence dear, this is the real Grant Ilden."

Poor Grant's face was a study of bewilderment as he acknowledged the introduction. On one point at least his fierce denunciation of a moment before had been proved unjustifiable. There was no doubting the friendliness of the two girls. And he had accused Catherine of a jealous hatred of her rival. His face, that had been flushed, turned pale.

But it was the only outward sign that he gave of the sudden chill doubt of himself which had come to frighten him.

"And why the real Grant Ilden?" he asked, his tone polite and formal.

"That is a matter for Percival to explain," said Catherine with an animation which she tried in vain to control for Florence's sake. "But the time has come to tell you everything, now that we are depending upon your help."

"All the help that I can give is at your service," he said as she led the way back to the room from which they had come, and he listened in silence while Catherine ran hurriedly through the whole story of Despard's pursuit of Ilden, together with the recently-discovered explanation of his enmity, which showed beyond doubt that it was misplaced.

It was the story which she had been very anxious to share with him from the first moment when Ilden's account of the attempts on his life had made her eager for a confidant with whom to share her anxiety. But George, firm in his theory that his enemy was a member of the family, had bound her to secrecy. Now his theory was proved wrong, and the position was too serious to stand upon a merely theoretical point of honour. Catherine welcomed a new liberty, and told her story, not without a pleasant sense that it was making Grant very much ashamed of his accusations. Not that she made the slightest reference to them, or made any direct or apparent effort to meet them. But she confessed her mad suspicion against Lady Ilden, and turned to her to thank her again for the readiness with which it had been forgiven.

Grant's face became more and more strained as he listened, until Cathie felt quite sorry for him.

But, when she had finished, it was only of George's danger that he spoke, justifying her reliance upon him by his suggestions.

There was just a probability, he thought, that Ilden might have changed his mind after all and returned to Sydenham. They might, at least, wire to him there and inquire. It would be as well, too, to wire to Lochtarry, on the vague chance that he might actually have decided to go there and have taken Percival into his confidence, improbable as it appeared.

Grant was loth to believe his brother a complete scoundrel, in spite of the evidence which Percival had given him throughout his life. For himself, Grant proposed to make inquiries along the line, in the hope of discovering at what point Ilden had left the train which Catherine herself saw him enter.

It was not till he was starting, and Cathie was left for a moment alone with him in the hall, that his eyes dared to meet hers.

"Can you ever forgive me?" he said, deeply, and Cathie managed to look judicial, although her heart was beating quickly.

"I do not think you realise yet how much there is to forgive," she said gravely.

"I realise that I have acted abominably. I ought to have known that you, the best woman in the world, could not have acted as I was mad enough to think."

"Despite my infatuation for cousin George?" she asked, coldly; and Grant hesitated, biting his lip.

Did she expect him to pretend that she was not in love with Ilden? He could not perjure himself, and Cathie took pity on his confusion.

"There is one more thing that I think I ought to tell you, after the horrible things that you have said," she proceeded severely. "I do not think that cousin George would mind now that he has found a perfect wife and realised how foolish it would have been to marry for convenience. But the day before he met Florence he asked me to be his wife. I refused because I did not think it right to marry one for whom I could feel only friendship."

Grant's face had flushed.

"You refused him!" he repeated, too surprised to quite conceal the incredulity in his voice, and Cathie's brow contracted.

"Forgive me," he said quickly, "I have been a jealous fool. I see it now that it is too late for you ever to forgive what I have said."

His tone was sufficiently penitent now to justify her in relaxing a little of her severity.

"I will forgive you," she said, "when you have found cousin George."

Something in the tone made it seem as though she had promised more than he had asked, more than he could ever allow himself to ask, unless the reading of his father's will on the next day fulfilled the hopes that he was building on it.

He raised her hand to his lips and kissed it with an intensity that thrilled and almost frightened her, and then without a word turned to leave the house and begin his quest.

His heart beat high with a hope that was almost pain. To know that Catherine Hay was free to be won, to dream that she might even now care for him, and not to know whether his father's will would put it in his power to try and win her.

The doubt tortured him, mingling its bitterness with the sweetness or what she had told him, and he put the thought of her away resolutely. She had demanded a service of him, and he gave all his mind to its fulfilment.

But as he passed from telegraph office to railway station and from one station to another, making inquiries everywhere, a question seemed to ring monotonously in his head not to be silenced: Shall I ever be able to ask her? Shall I ever be able to ask her?

At Shipton Gate his repeated inquiry met for the first time with success. The station-master recognised his description of Ilden without hesitation, and was sure that he had alighted there on the previous morning. He was equally sure that the gentleman had not returned to the station, and Grant wired off to the Castle where the two girls waited in suspense, Florence building her hopes on an answer from Sydenham which never came.

They started for Shipton Gate by the next train.

An Unjust Will.

It was not until the body of Rupert Ilden had been laid in the family vault without any sign of George's appearance that hope died finally in the heart of the seekers.

Catherine recalled how determined he had been to let no thought of his own danger interfere with the duty he owed his uncle.

(Continued on next page.)

For those Exposed to the Weather.

EFFECTS OF COLD AND WET ON THE SYSTEM.

Out-door workers, and those whose occupations necessitate their spending a good deal of time in the open air, should take steps to fortify their systems against bad results. Cold and wet throw extra work upon the internal organs, and liver chill, piles, and rheumatism are often contracted during the winter season.

One of the best-known figures on the high road from Breadsall to Derby was Mrs. Caroline Bennett, of the Mill Farm, Breadsall. Morning after morning, through sleet, or rain, or snow, she drove to the county town with the milk. One day she was missed, and an enquiry showed that she had contracted a severe chill which had attacked her liver and compelled her to keep to her bed. That other ailment which commonly results from cold and wet—piles—also affected her, and had it not been for Charles Forde's Bile Beans the results would doubtless have been most serious.

"I suffered terribly for three or four months," says Mrs. Bennett, "the piles being so painful and the liver complaint taking all power to fight against pain out of me. I could not walk, being so weak, and I was getting worse and worse no matter what medicine I took, when a relative advised me to try Chas. Forde's Bile Beans."

"I soon found out the worth of them. They commenced to do me good after I had taken the first dose. In a week or two the piles disappeared, and as I continued taking Bile Beans, the liver disorder I had suffered from ceased. It has now left my system completely, and I am as well and strong as ever. I shall always feel grateful to Bile Beans, and would advise those who suffer as I did to give them a fair trial."

All chemists stock Chas. Forde's Bile Beans, or they may be obtained post free for 1/1½ or 2/9 per box from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., Red Cross St., London, E.C. They fortify the system against winter's trying weather, and cure liver chills, piles, rheumatism, headache, digestive disorders, and constipation. Avoid imitations.

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Percival too, who stuck staunchly to his story that Ilden had told him he was going to Scotland and denied as stoutly having given Lady Ilden any name but his own, made no secret of the fact that his cousin had promised distinctly to be present at the ceremony.

As a matter of fact he looked for his appearance there with considerable anxiety, and as the funeral cortege returned to the house felt inclined to congratulate himself that he was a decided step nearer to the Barony of Ilden than he had been two days earlier.

"Ilden is one of those fools who make much of a promise," he said to himself, "and if he were alive he would be here."

It was the thought which, differently expressed in Catherine's mind, forbade her even to speak of hope any longer to the dry-eyed woman at her side whom she had learnt to love, and who seemed to depend upon her so completely.

The remembrance of George's promise had brought the two as a last hope to Mordenbale, where they watched the last scene in the old-fashioned churchyard without joining the mourners. But the figure for which they watched did not appear to join the little group round the grave.

It was a reward perhaps for the lack of any human sympathy or emotion which the Honourable Rupert had shown during his life that so little personal thought of him was in the minds of those who paid to his body the last outward tribute of respect.

His brother was thinking uneasily of the chances of his own death, and impatiently waiting for the time when the ceremony would be over and he could drown his uneasiness in a debauch that would only bring the death he feared more quickly.

Percival was patently nervous and restless, and could not keep his glance from wandering round the churchyard. Sir Charles Barton showed a more perfect decorum outwardly, while he calculated for the hundredth time how much his wife was likely to benefit pecuniarily by her father's death.

And even Grant, although he was the sincerest mourner present, had received from the man who was dead too little of sympathy or affection to make his sense of loss conquer the anxieties which filled his mind.

He could not forget either, that the fate of his cousin was still unsolved, or that the next hour would decide whether he was a beggar—his interests, ignored as they had always been for the benefit of his brother—or the possessor of an income, modest enough, but sufficient perhaps to justify him in asking for the hand of the woman he loved without feeling disgraced by her wealth.

His suspense increased as they wended their way back to the rambling old house close by. It was indeed only a stone's-throw from the churchyard, from which its grounds were separated only by a narrow coppice.

The nearest cut was by a path through the coppice, but the mourners went round by the road, Grant with his eyes moodily cast on the ground, and his mind full of anticipative misgivings.

Sir Charles, walking at his side, tried to enter into conversation.

"I understand from your brother that your poor father made a new will at the Hall just before the end. It seems strange to me that Jane should have known nothing of the fact. I suppose that you did?"

"No," said Grant gloomily. "My father did not take me into his confidence at all. At the end especially

he seemed to have a prejudice against me, and only cared for Percy to be with him."

The remembrance did not add to his hopefulness. He had felt at the time that his brother was intriguing against him for some purpose of his own. If his father had really made a new will at his instigation, the purpose was likely to be made patent now.

At the time he had scarcely cared. Money had seemed to matter so little when he believed that Catherine was in love with Ilden. Now he could be indifferent no longer; but whatever his father had done at Percival's instigation had been done irretrievably.

He walked onward with downcast eyes again, and did not notice, as he might have done had he turned just before, entering the house, that Catherine was hastening after him at her utmost speed, distractedly seeking his assistance.

It was to Grant that her thoughts had instantly flown when the need presented itself; but it was too urgent for her to follow him. Some of the servants following the chief mourners had stopped, and Catherine appealed to them excitedly.

"Despard, the man who tried to kill Lord Ilden, is hiding in the coppice. Lady Ilden has followed him. I want you to come at once to her assistance!"

The story of the midnight intruder at Pennybrook Hall, for whose recapture Mr. Jasper had offered a reward, had already been carried from Pennybrook to Mordenbale, and Cathie's summons caused as much excitement as she could have desired. A little crowd followed her back to the point in the coppice where Florence had caught sight of Guy. Despard's haggard face watching the mourners as they moved away from the churchyard.

"I must see him and make him tell me what he has done," Florence had cried, and Catherine was already inclined to regret the decision which had made her hasten for assistance instead of accompanying her; for in the coppice path was no sign either of the desperado or the brave girl who had gone alone in pursuit. The little party spread itself out among the trees in a vain search.

But in the house nothing was known as yet of this new sensation which had made the ordinary excitement of a funeral insignificant by comparison.

In the gloomy dining-room Mr. Murgatroyd was unfolding the last will and testament of the man who had just been laid in the grave, a will drawn up and signed only two days before his death.

Its reading was a matter of only a few minutes. For the will itself was a short and simple one. Apart from a trifling bequest to his daughter, Lady Barton, and an annuity of a hundred pounds a year to his second son, Grant, the dead man had left everything to his elder son and heir.

To Grant it seemed only a moment from their return to the house before it was all over, and he realised that his worst fears were fulfilled. His father had been as unjust in death as he had been in life, and had left him a pauper.

He rose dizzily, his voice breaking the silence that had fallen on the room.

"There is no mention made of my mother's money. It was understood that that should be mine on my father's death."

Mr. Murgatroyd rubbed his fat little hands together.

"If such an understanding existed, it is one to which my late client has not chosen to give effect. His late wife's fortune was left entirely to his disposal. His disposal of it which is





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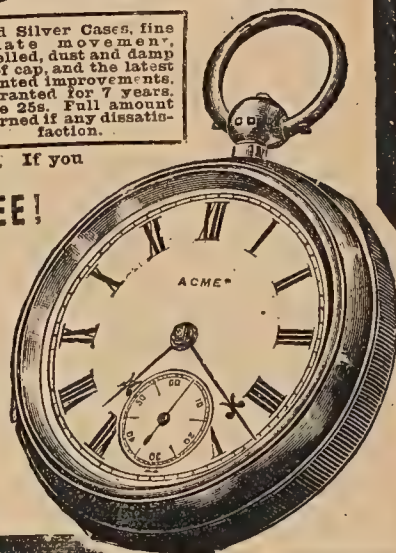
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included in the document before us, is all that has legal force. It is open, of course, to your brother, the residuary legatee, to give what effect he wishes to any private wish or understanding that is not mentioned here."

Grant smiled bitterly. To appeal to the generosity of his brother! That would be hopeless indeed.

But the thought of Catherine, which had nerved him to make the protest, might even have urged him to the hopeless appeal if Percival's face had not answered it already.

He turned upon him with a sudden outburst of anger.

"This is your doing," he cried. "My father would never have been so unjust."

"That is an opinion which I must indorse," said Sir Charles, who till now had been speechless with indignation at the bequest made to his wife. "When the will is so extraordinary in character, so inconsistent with those deep ties of affection which connected my poor father-in-law with his younger children, I must protest with Grant that there is *prima-facie* evidence in support of his theory that undue influence has been used to affect poor Mr. Ilden's mind at the last."

But Grant did not wait to take part in the wordy wrangle that followed. The thing was irretrievable. Henceforth he had no home and no brother. He must go out into the world, a wanderer, and he walked abruptly from the room to pack up his few belongings, leaving the irate baronet to fight his own battle, a battle doomed at the outset.

Percival was smiling with a consciousness of his triumph and its security.

"I cannot see how anybody can call the will extraordinary," he said indolently. "My father was naturally anxious that Mordenhale should be kept up as it ought to be, and knew that such a thing would be impossible if he squandered among you all the income which he himself found barely sufficient for the purpose. I do not pretend that there has been any personal preference in the matter. If I had been the second son I should have been in Grant's position. If I die without an heir he will be in mine."

"And in any case your sister's interests are totally ignored," said Charles, hotly. "I protest that there has been undue influence brought to bear on my father-in-law."

Percival smiled complacently.

"This is scarcely the place to discuss the question," he said, rising. "If you care to carry it into a court of law, I can trust the defence of the will to Mr. Murgatroyd. I myself am leaving England, as you know, and start immediately. So I am afraid that I must leave the discussion, if you want it here, to Mr. Murgatroyd, and your entertainment to my uncle, who has kindly promised to act as host for me while I make my final preparations."

He left the room as he spoke, with a complacent smile on his handsome, wicked face, which faded away abruptly as he reached the hall; for entering through the doorway was the man whom he had almost felt justified in looking upon as dead and removed from the path of his ambition.

(The conclusion of this story will appear in next Tuesday's issue.)

JACK: "It's all over. I'm a cooked goose." Tom: "Wouldn't she have you?" Jack: "Confound it, no. Cool as a cucumber about it." Tom: "Any chance of—er—her exercising woman's peculiar prerogative?" Jack: "Changing her mind? Not a bit." Tom: "I suppose, too, you had planned to buy her a ring if she'd have you?" Jack: "Yes, I suppose so." Tom: "Had your money all saved up for it, hadn't you?" Jack: "I should say so. Had £10 all ready." Tom: "Ah, yes. I say, Jack—" Jack: "Well?" Tom: "You—er—couldn't lend me—er—a fiver till you find some girl who will have you, could you?"

PEDLAR: "Is the lady of the house in?" Mr. Newlywed: "Yes; but there isn't a thing in the wide world we want." Pedlar: "All right, sir; I'll call again when the honeymoon is over."

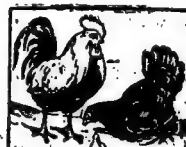
FAT LADY: "I am going to ride on one of the donkeys, and will pay for one for you if you like to accompany me." Small Boy: "Thankee, mum, but I'd rather sit here and laugh."

GOODLUCK has had his salary raised; was it for extra work? "Yes. He always listens when the proprietor tells his baby's smart sayings."

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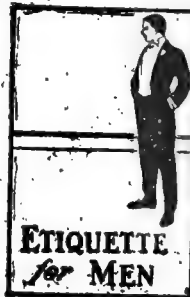
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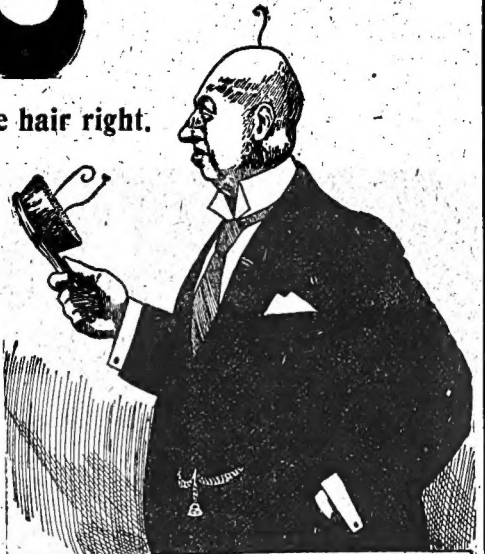
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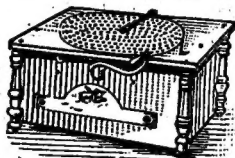
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(No. 465.)

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By Cynthia.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette.

All communications must in future be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.]

A Word in Advance.

NATURALLY before you accept me as your adviser in place of Miss Morris, you will like to have a word or two from me as to the lines on which I am going to try and carry on her work. First, let me say there are very few things on which I do not share the views of Miss Morris. Like her, I shall not try to sit in judgment on anyone, but hope to find myself in sympathy with all my clients, whom I shall try and advise from a human, and not a judicial point of view. Nobody need be afraid to write to me out of fear that I shall think them foolish. We are all foolish in some form or another, and, oftener than not, in matters of the heart. Though a woman, do not let that fact prevent those of the opposite sex, if they feel disposed, from writing to me. I am no enthusiast about "Woman's Rights," and shall never attempt to champion one sex against the other.

Further, I hope to have among my clients, not only young unmarried couples, but also married ones. Love does not end with matrimony, but only enters on a new phase. Any troubles between married people, therefore, will have my earnest attention. If you have any puzzling question about etiquette, or want a little advice as to how to behave under strange circumstances, I will try and counsel you how I should act myself were I in your position. So let me, before entering on my duties, hope that, as in the case of Miss Morris, I and my readers will soon become fast friends, and know each other as well as is possible through the medium of cold print.

A Changeable Girl.

"R. E. G." met a girl three years ago, but she told him she could not like him as he wished her to. The other day he met her again. She now confesses that she likes "R. E. G." much more than she did. However, "R. E. G." has his doubts. He thinks that if anybody has once taken a dislike to another, they can never really alter that sentiment however they try. He asks me is it so with girls?

No, it is not so, "R. E. G." Three years ago you may have had mannerisms which did not appeal to the girl. Further, she may have then had different ideas of men to those she at present holds. Time brings great changes. On her meeting you again, she may have perceived something about you which did not originally strike her, and quite possibly may have completely changed her views. I have known of scores of cases of persons ultimately learning to grow very fond of those whom they have once disliked. As has been pointed out in *Pearson's Weekly*, what we call "dislike" is only too often another name for unconscious love. To instantly "like" a person often means that their attractiveness is only on the surface, and is never likely to go deeper. To "dislike" them often means that one does not understand them. Further acquaintance brings out points in their character which one does not observe at first. So do not let any theory you may entertain stand in the way of your intimacy with this girl.

A Unique Case.

"W. L. W."—Your case is extraordinary. I have every sympathy with you, as I fear you are the victim of a wrong train of thought. I should imagine you have never had a very extensive acquaintance with the opposite sex. Too many men shut themselves off from women solely out of nervousness and reserve. Continued absence of meeting with girls makes many men delude themselves that they are women-haters, whereas all that is really wrong with them is this shyness. Let me advise you to try your hardest to meet as many women as you can. They will bring out many good qualities which your aloofness hides from view. I do not prophesy that you will readily meet the woman of your heart, as you are very likely a man of a distinct temperament. But continued meetings with women will enable you to form a right judgment as to which type of the sex is most in sympathy with you.

Boy and Girl Love.

"Dick" is eighteen, and is in love with a very attractive girl of seventeen. Naturally, he is too young to become engaged to her, but, at the same time, wishes to have some understanding with her. They have, therefore, arranged that, if they continue to know each other in four or five years' time, they will resume the intimacy. Their parents do not know of this, and "Dick" asks me if it is his duty to tell them.

You are very sensible, "Dick," to wait until you are in a position to become engaged, and your arrangement is, I think, the best you could make. Of course, as neither of you are in any way bound to each other, I do not see that you need reveal your understanding to your parents unless you think necessary. You should convey to her parents that you would like their consent to your friendship with their daughter, and if they are willing that you should meet each other you need not reveal anything about an understanding until it becomes necessary. There is nothing at all unusual in friendships between boys and girls (if you will excuse the expression), and I believe most parents prefer their daughters to be in the society of those of their own age than older and often less sincere suitors.

A Photo Question.

"L. M." (Johannesburg) writes: "Would it be etiquette for me to send a photo to a gentleman friend whom I have known for six months? He asked me for one before he went away, but I had not one to give him. Then he asked me to send it to him."

It all depends on your relationship with the gentleman friend. If he is a chance acquaintance, it is not usual for a girl to send her photograph. If you have promised to do so, of course, send it, but if not I should wait until you know more of the gentleman. If you have been very friendly with him, there can be no harm in an exchange of photos.

See a Doctor.

LIL is constantly troubled with styes in her eyes, and has tried many remedies without result. Can I recommend anything? Well, Lil, styes in the eye are only an outward sign of disordered blood. Certain persons are more liable to them than others. If you have one only occasionally, the cure recommended is bathing at intervals with hot water until the styne bursts. But if you are very much the victim of them, you should ask your doctor to prescribe medicine which will put your system in order. In your case I recommend the latter. The doctor's fee is often an economy, seeing what bad results spring from neglecting oneself.

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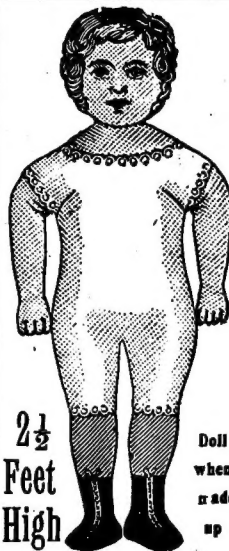
The London office of a well-known publishing house is creating a deal of surprised interest here in the subject of hypnotism and allied science by the novel method of giving away books absolutely free. By merely writing to the Psychic Research Publishing Company, Temple Chambers, Temple Avenue, E.C., you can, according to their advertisement, receive by return post a most remarkable, fascinating, and instructive illustrated book called "The Power Within." This book and accompanying literature contain some most startling information, setting forth not only how to set about to learn hypnotism at your own home, but revealing the fact that this mysterious art is now actually being used to advantage by English people in daily life.

According to the publishers, the aim of this startling little free book is to answer such questions as occur to all interested in the mysterious relation between mind and matter.

Such questions as these, for instance:—Can I learn how to hypnotise? Why is the art not more widely known? Just how should I set about it to learn at home, and practise it? Is instantaneous hypnotism possible? What is "personal magnetism," and how is it acquired? What is the mysterious secret of the wonderful success and influence of certain people who seem most ordinary in other ways? Is there really a scientific mode of life or thought which attracts health, success, and happiness? Is it possible to thus radically change one's whole life in a few days, as many claim to have done? Is it true that humanity in general is, in a sense, hypnotised by conventionality and thus blinded to splendid opportunities for success and happiness which lie on every hand? What can I do to arouse myself from this "hypnosis of custom," and rise to the attainments which my natural ability would warrant? What must I do to become a hypnotist? To develop a magnetic, attractive, forceful character? To acquire courage, ambition, cheerfulness? To kill fear and worry? To make myself a source of happiness and inspiration to my friends?

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As the nature of the contents of this book is of such vital interest and importance to many, it is requested that no one write out of mere curiosity. It is desired to supply the book only to those having a genuine wish to be informed on these subjects.



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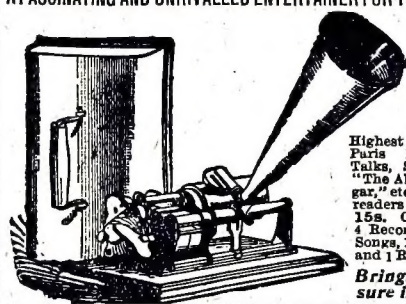
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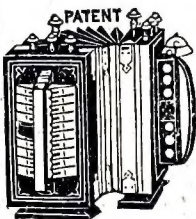


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